

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS

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Abstract

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The aim of this research is to examine the support and development of cultural identity in early childhood settings in Leicester and Leicestershire. The main players are the practitioners, the parents and the children, all of whom participated in a variety of ways. No two settings are alike; each has a philosophy, resources, a mix of practitioners, children and parents, local community, and infrastructure unique to that setting. Each responds accordingly. All are committed to the concept of supporting and developing cultural identity, though they do it in different ways.

The research employs both quantitative and qualitative methodology. Initially, setting-questionnaires were employed to establish an overview of resources, opinions, and ethnicity of children and practitioners in twenty-five settings. Seventy-five parents associated with the settings contributed their opinions. Seven varied settings, five in the inner-city and two in the county, were examined in-depth using a comprehensive research strategy employing a range of research instruments.

There are those who say we have no cultural identity until we are older, and those who say it begins at birth. Nonetheless, a cultural identity needs nurturing, recognition, and strengthening through the good practices of the practitioners and parents. The research identifies that one end of the continuum of good practice is excellence; well trained and informed practitioners, the ability to put that knowledge into practice, and well resourced settings. Good practice continued to be demonstrated despite having to share facilities; demonstrating how enthusiasm and commitment can overcome obstacles. The setting further along the continuum was by no means demonstrating restricted practice; it was just fixed in a time-scale that was not progressing along cultural awareness lines.

Cultural identity is a nebulous and elusive concept, difficult to grasp but with an all pervading influence. We all have a culture, but we don't always recognise it. Children are our future; it is our responsibility to ensure they grow up confident and purposeful, secure in the knowledge of themselves within their culture.

The research leads to the identification of good practice in a sample of settings, through the diversity of approaches appropriate to the users and local community. The intended application of this research, having examined examples of good practice, is to influence the process of initial practitioners' training and continuing professional development.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

The essence of our effort to see every child has a chance must be to assure each an equal opportunity, not to become equal, but to become different – to realize whatever unique potential of body, mind and spirit he or she possesses.

John Martin Fischer, Professor of Philosophy

Always keep learning. It keeps you young.

Patty Berg (1918 – 2006)

Introduction

This chapter introduces the researcher, gives directions through the format of the thesis, and sets the scene for the research process. This research focuses on contextual and cultural dimensions of identity. The context in this instance is a sample of early years' settings where young children are left in the care of others. The research will focus on four aspects: the physical setting, the actions of the child, how aware parents are of cultural identity being recognition in the setting, and how the practitioners perceive themselves to be supporting cultural identity formation.

In this chapter I reflect on:

- the interest and commitment to cultural diversity over many years by the researcher, my personal and professional 'cultural journey'
- culture and cultural identity formation.
- the purpose of the research, namely to add an original contribution to knowledge that can contribute to the continuing professional development of early years practitioners
- the choice of resources to promote anti-discriminatory play
- key terms used in early years' settings

The child is surrounded by culture, and cultural experiences, from birth. These experiences become internalised and as growth and development take place, a multi-faceted identity emerges. Young children are absorbing what they see,

hear, taste, smell, and feel all the time; the task of this research is to identify the components of the environment of early years' settings that have particular impact on the formation of that process.

Culture and religion are deeply intertwined for many people, and they cannot easily be separated. The way they live is not different from what they believe. (Shah 2007: 36)

The research is not primarily about ethnicity, it will be an inclusive study of how children are located into the cultural dynamics of the setting. It is anticipated some of the children in the sampled settings will be children of refugee or asylum seekers.

Working for over forty years, largely in the area of early years care and education has convinced me of the need to understand, respect, and actively promote the need for every child to be treated as an individual. For emotional and spiritual health, I believe it is necessary to be aware of the impact of culture within the child's immediate world, and for practitioners to support the development of a positive cultural identity. Each has a right to their own culture (The United Nations Rights of the Child: 1989) to enable the child to develop with an intact identity that is within the context of their family background, beliefs and values. This will inevitably reflect the wider context of the cultural mainstream of the country of residence, which is a reality faced by many children growing up in the United Kingdom today. By acknowledging and respecting their own culture, the hope is that the children will grow up with a greater tolerance of one another; there will be less emotional confusion and turmoil, greater fulfilment and positive self-esteem taken into adulthood.

Cultural identity needs nurturing so that children can believe themselves to belong, comfortable within themselves, through acceptance by their peers and significant others.

Minority youth ... should, from the early toddler and preschool years, believe that they can have a positive impact on the world. Environments could be restructured to support children's acquisition of a sense of personal efficacy and thus the (evolution) of a more constructive identity and the perception and experience of a competent self.

(Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990: 306)

One form of data collection proposed for the research is to ask practitioners to describe their own experiences of cultural awareness in the form of a 'cultural journey'. This approach involves an unstructured interview where the practitioner recalls significant points of cultural awareness from their childhood, into adulthood, as a practitioner, and if appropriate as a parent. This chapter seems to be a useful place to start for a description of my own 'cultural journey' to identify the salient points, progression, and development over several decades in chronological sequence.

Living on an all white council estate in Derby, during a time of austerity soon after the Second World War when no-one had much money, my cultural horizons were limited. From an early age I had a black doll that I loved. I tended her, dressing and undressing, wrapped in a blanket for a cuddle, until one fateful day I bathed her and her leg broke off. She was made of papier mache and I was too young to anticipate this result. I was heartbroken. We children made our own entertainment; a pool of yellow street light the meeting place, the surrounding dark hedges secret hiding places. We played tag and marbles, hide and seek and two-balls on the wall: simple games and simple pleasures. 'Look at that', eyes wide, my mother and I stood at the kerbside as a black car, a rare sight in our streets, cruised down the road. At the front two dark skinned men, but the back held an exotic sight. Two Indian women, heads shrouded in brilliant glittering shawls, gazed out at the grey depressing street scene where the unprepossessing houses all had the same coloured front door. This was excitement indeed. It was not until my secondary education I came into contact with black girls and I envied their confidence and playfulness.

My earliest professional experience is of working in education nurseries at the end of the 1950s, in an inner-city area with a substantial minority ethnic population, and one that gave no concessions to difference including culture, 'race', or religion. Not only was it not on the agenda, it was somehow impolite even mentioning these differences. It was a culturally-blind, 'colour'-blind approach. Other anomalies not experienced today were the lack of involvement, or indeed interest in the parents; there were no representations of minority ethnic children or families on nursery resources like books and puzzles, no dressing up clothes representing different cultures, the home corner (Wendy House) was never other than a representation of an English house, and languages other than English were disregarded.

The first children I encountered in my professional career to come from diverse backgrounds were two boys in a nursery class in inner city Derby circa 1961. One was from a recently settled Indian family, and one from Eastern Europe; Prabudas and Jozef (all names have been changed in this research). Jozef spoke a little English, understanding more, although his mother - our only contact with the family - struggled to make herself understood. She was viewed as strange with her unusual clothes, staccato speech in a language we did not understand, and wildly gesturing hands. Jozef was white, did not stand out in the classroom, and was consequently lost in the crowd.

Conversely Prabudas, having a different skin colour and perceived as coming from an 'exotic' culture, was treated with delight, almost like a pet. There was no comprehension whatsoever of his background, or the need for understanding the implications of cultural diversity. For many months Prabudas smiled, watched, and listened but did not say anything. For Halloween, amongst other decorations, a large spider on a thread was suspended from the door frame. A member of staff walked through the doorway while carrying him (an action afforded to few other children). Prabudas whacked the spider with his hand and clearly said 'spider'. There was great joy and excitement from the staff and Prabudas beamed at all the attention he was receiving. From that point on, he

began to use more and more English words. The culture of these two boys was totally ignored, language was the only factor recognised as a barrier to full integration. As far as I am aware parents were not asked to come into the nursery, were not questioned about home culture, the children had no key worker, nor received any additional support. No parent was encouraged to do more than deliver their child to the door, although the occasional one ventured as far as the coat rail. I remember one mother was considered a nuisance because she hung around, desperately wanting to come in and be involved in the nursery. Indeed Jozef's mother hovered around but was sent away as no-one knew what to do with her. Nor was cultural diversity referred to in the training of practitioners. Consequently the nursery was a culturally monolithic environment.

Cultural awareness in terms of 'race' and gender began to grow in the 1970s, commensurate with the passing of the Race Relations Act 1976 although according to Lane (1999:50) this was a limited tool for addressing racism. Multiculturalism rose up the agenda in early years' settings in the 1980s when a small but welcome range of cultural resources became available from mainstream educational suppliers. There was however resistance to purchasing these products within the childcare sector due to the high prices of many of the resources combined with lack of cultural knowledge of practitioners, from anxiety in their use by some, or a lack of appreciation of the need for them by others. In the mid 1980s the Early Years Trainers Anti-racist Network (EYTARN) (now known as Early Years Equality, (eye)) became established, raising awareness through conferences and publications. During the intervening years I had worked, among other places, in Derby, Birmingham, Leicestershire, and for many years in Leicester City where considerable emphasis was placed on providing good quality practice to accommodate the rich mix of cultures within the city's population. My cultural awareness was raised through the daily contact with colleagues and contacts willing to share cultural experiences. Awareness grew in the childcare community generally, and with myself in

particular during my involvement in the lengthy consultation process, and subsequent introduction of the Children Act 1989, when it became a requirement to take multiculturalism seriously. As part of the registration process under the new legislation, Registration and Inspection Officers, the Social Services officers delegated with this task, took The Children Act Guidance 1989 into nurseries, playgroups, and crèches and expected them to demonstrate their compliance with the Act. This involved the assessment of provision and a requirement to provide appropriate resources, personnel and activities.

The Children Act 1989 was the first major piece of British legislation to recognise and value the importance of the cultural dimension of a child's life. A significant statement in the guidance recommending respect and value of cultures is:

People working with young children should value and respect the different racial origins, religions, cultures and languages in a multi-cultural society so that each child is valued as an individual without racial or gender stereotyping. (HMSO 1991:34)

In communities with significant minority ethnic populations, improvements were observed, equal opportunity policies in service delivery for young children were drawn up, parents became more actively involved, and focused training was offered. Many less experienced practitioners were anxious about adding this dimension to their curriculum, as they did not feel they had the knowledge to deliver, and claimed they were meeting the criteria by celebrating the occasional non-Christian festival. I devised training programmes for practitioners, and learnt from those with more experience than myself. I worked with many inspirational, knowledgeable people who generously answered my many questions with grace and patience. As part of my continuing professional development, I achieved a Masters degree, the research presented in an unpublished dissertation 'Providing for play in a multicultural city: Under fives in the Community' (Jones 1990). The research undertaken for this in Leicester was with parents and practitioners, half of each group being Asian Hindus and half being from the white indigenous population.

As Manager of Early Childhood Services in Leicester over many years I recruited hundreds of childcare practitioners, and was able to assess at first hand, through relevant questioning and observation, both cultural awareness and how the candidates were able to put this knowledge into practice. Experience showed me that broadly speaking practitioners living and working in vibrant multicultural communities had much greater awareness than those living even in the suburbs of the city. To those less exposed to diversity it was not unusual to hear comments like 'we only have two Asian children so we do not need to consider that', 'it's not important to us in our setting because it's not in the city', 'we celebrate Diwali and Chinese New Year every year' and to consider that as meeting the requirements. It was important to me that all communities were represented and well trained and in a city that, at the time, had a BME (black minority ethnic) population of 28%, we maintained an ethnic representation of practitioners. In the 150 childcare practitioners for whom I was responsible, one third of them were representatives from Black, Asian, and other minority communities. While they were low in numbers, we also maintained the national average for male and disabled practitioners. It was these experiences which led me to undertake this research in Leicester and Leicestershire, an area I know well and in which I am known, to enable me to provide data from a multi-ethnic city and a predominately white county to give perspective on the experiences of different lifestyles, opportunities, and experiences.

The 1990s saw anti-discriminatory work introduced and a greater acceptance of inclusiveness. In geographical areas with low levels of involvement with minority ethnic representation, development of awareness continued to be slower. Increasingly there is legislation and a policy framework to support race equality as described later in the review of the literature (Chapter 2). One particular highlight in my 'cultural journey' occurred in 1994; Iram Siraj-Blatchford published a book 'The Early Years: laying the foundations for racial equality'. It

confirmed everything I had been attempting to achieve up to that point, boosting me like a battery charger, to go on and do more. Registering for this research degree is a direct outcome of this personal challenge. The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson 1999) raised the issue that ignorance of cultural awareness is unacceptable, and this applies to many organisations including early years' settings. There is much greater awareness of cultural diversity in the twenty-first century, and an expectation of diversity being addressed in the resources and practices of the setting, although they remain patchy and of variable quality. Today children's cultural, linguistic, class and gender backgrounds are not an optional extra for early years' practitioners to consider. Rather they are central to an understanding of children's development and achievement, and to the promotion of a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum.

Over the last eighteen years I have had the opportunity to travel and gain valuable experience in diverse cultures in many countries. I have visited many nurseries and schools, have been invited into homes and observed child-rearing practices, have stayed with indigenous families, and taught pre-school teachers. I have visited Pakistan, China, Peru, Mexico, India, Reunion, Australia, France, Uganda, Nicaragua, New Zealand, Kenya, and Morocco. These experiences have added immensely to my wealth of knowledge which I am able to utilise in my work.

I believe knowledge should be shared, so for many years I have been writing, largely for national magazines aimed at practitioners, sharing my experiences and observation of good practice, particularly in relation to cultural diversity. I have also written books on training and festivals for mainstream publishers.

Culture and cultural identity

The term culture is variously defined and understood by different people. For the purposes of this research I employ a broad definition which encompasses, among other things, lifestyle, beliefs, religion, childrearing practices, family roles,

customs, language, and the historical context. This has led to a working understanding of cultural identity, in this research, being broadly defined as children knowing who they are within the context of their culture. This includes ethnicity as identified by the adults involved (parents and practitioners), whether that be white, black, more specific as in Indian or Jewish, and reflecting religious and other perspectives as identified by them. Self identification (by parents), or identification from parent records (used by practitioners), gives an indication of how those directly involved see themselves and their children, and the definitions important to themselves.

According to The Runnymede Trust (2000:84) each community defines its own cultural preferences and priorities including

... matters such as household size, marriage, the upbringing of children, gender roles and the division of labour, personal independence, physical and emotional space, the maintenance of tradition and cultural identity, self-employment, and what constitutes a worth-while job.

Cultural identity is a very imprecise term; it can encompass an accumulation of lifestyle attributes, social customs, group affiliation, inner beliefs, and concepts generated from our inner selves. These experiences surrounding us in our early life are taken for granted, yet are powerful influences in the formation of being who we are. From this diverse collection of notions develops our self-identity; who we feel we are, with whom we have rapport, and where we feel we belong. The development of a cultural identity is part of the socialisation process. Our construct of culture can be likened to a patchwork quilt of diversity, fitting together with distinctive differences, observable and defined. The connection of multiple cultural experiences linking together, and supporting one another, add interest and a pattern to our lives to make a wholeness which is identified by us as our personal cultural identity. The cultural patchwork quilt is however ever changing as each 'patch' interacts with the next one and that in its turn influences another. Working holistically with children, recognising cultural diversity, and educating practitioners and significant adults is a long-term investment worth the effort which will be required.

Researching with young children

Researching with young children is a comparatively recently recognised phenomenon. At the start of this research there was little published work on this subject; now there are numerous texts written by experienced researchers including (Aubrey, C. et al (2000), Christensen and James (2000), Lane (2008), Lewis and Lindsay (2000), Mac Naughton, Rolfe, Siraj-Blatchford (2001), Nutbrown (2002), Lewis et al (2004), Farrell (2005), Greene and Hogan (2005). As children and childcare have moved up the agenda, so academics have recognised that this area of research is a specialism in its own right and have responded by providing the tools for addressing this focus. Early years' settings are powerful sites which have the potential for very positive influence on the state of a child's cultural health. They also have potential for state intervention in supporting the aims of an individual's right to be recognised and respected within their own cultural norms within the context of United Kingdom laws. This is recognised in the Department for children, schools and families (DCSF) Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (2008: 12, 15) under two Early Learning Goals.

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- Have a developing respect for their own cultures and beliefs and those of other people.
- Understand that people have different needs, views, cultures and beliefs, that need to be treated with respect.
- Understand that they can expect others to treat their needs, views, cultures and beliefs with respect.

Knowledge and Understanding of the World

- Begin to know about their own cultures and beliefs and those of other people.

The research is not primarily about non-white ethnicity, although the term cultural identity is sometimes perceived as such, particularly by some of the parents. The research is designed to be an inclusive study of how all children are accommodated into the cultural dynamics of the setting. It was anticipated

some of the children attending the settings identified would be children of refugees or asylum seekers. Culturally diverse environments, play provision, and resources, are expected by the Government; included in training courses for child-carers; it is included in the DCSF Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)(2008: 23, 75); and assessed by Ofsted.

Children, while in a continuum of development and learning, come to have a firmer understanding of who they are between the ages of three and five (Shaffer 1994: 214), although awareness starts to grow in the two year-old. To illustrate from personal experience of a child growing up in a predominantly white family; one relative, seen regularly, was black. Growing up, Tom made no differentiation between members of the family; he just liked them to play with him. He liked having a cuddle, and for his first three years made no spontaneous reference to her skin colour. When touching, perhaps stroking her arm, if questioned on differences between his own skin colour and hers he looked bewildered and said it was the same. Soon after his third birthday he was asked again if his relative's arm was the same colour as his. He looked and nodded assent, turning his head away, quickly looking back though more intensely this time. Stroking her arm, Tom had a puzzled look on his face, his eyes opened wide and a look of amazement appeared on his face. 'No,' he said 'her arm's black'.

Brown (1998:22) gives examples of comments made by under five-year-olds which illustrates the values picked up from their peers, adults, and the wider society. There is also a reluctance by adults to discuss issues concerned with 'race' and culture, not wanting to draw attention to differences, which means children 'may learn that it's not a good idea to express negative attitudes in front of adults'. Millam (1996:5) cites research which demonstrates three-year-olds showing signs of racial prejudice, and Connolly (2007: 50) finding two-year-olds noticing difference in skin colour, and attaching values to it between three and five years. Gay and (cited in Lane 2008: 88) found that 'failure to recognise children's 'blackness' damaged some black children's view of themselves and that children's racial identity is crucial for their successful development'.

In terms of new knowledge production ... it seems that worldwide there is interest in the earliest years of life and their importance for lifelong education. (Aubrey et al 2000:4)

Practitioners need to have the confidence and understanding to promote the development of cultural identity. This research will enable me to gain the views of parents and practitioners, to observe and record practice, and to place it in the public domain. Positive self-esteem includes knowing ourselves within our cultural context.

Research was defined by Lawrence Stenhouse as systematic inquiry whose results are placed in the public domain. (Aubrey et al 2000:4)

The research objectives

The objectives of this research, from the perspective of parents and practitioners in early years' settings, are to;

- identify the significant elements in the development of cultural identity in young children
- identify how they perceive they promote their own and other cultures within early years' settings
- assess the practice by observing practitioners and children
- recognise good practice in the development of cultural identity in early years' settings

One of the difficulties of research into cultural identity is having a precise definition of what the term means, different researchers have different experiences and different expectations. I have defined it as lifestyle, beliefs, religion, childrearing practices, family roles, customs, language, and the historical context, but the real question is 'Is what I see fixed, unchanging, constant, predictable?', and the answer is emphatically no. I am looking at the cultural context of early years' settings for an understanding of what good practice is and how this is represented. The fluidity and imprecise nature of culture makes it difficult to catch and keep hold of. It means different things to different people. Warren (2004: 130) asserts:

The ethnographer's approach to the real can sometimes resemble the collections of artefacts found in museums. These collections, whether they be in museums, in research theses or the peer reviewed texts of academic research, all embody particular notions of 'culture', how it can be understood and represented.

Good practice needs to be developed in early years' settings because this is when children are being exposed to many new experiences. Attitudes from those around them are assimilated without any effort on the part of the child.

The propositions to be explored in this research relate to different aspects of early years care and provision. The first relates to physical resources within the early years' setting, the second to practitioners' awareness, background, experience and professional development, and the third professional practice in operation.

Research Propositions:

These are that:

- the provision and use of resources give powerful messages on the cultural health of the setting, and the potential for the development of the cultural identity of the child.
- practitioners understanding of cultural acquisition, which supports the development of quality practice has, in turn, a positive influence on the cultural identity development of young children.
- there are socialisation and interactive factors in the professional practice in early years' settings which are conducive to the positive development of cultural identity in young children.

Outcomes;

- to identify strategies for the promotion of good practice.
- to identify patterns of good practice in the acquisition of the formation of a child's cultural identity.
- to influence the practice of early years' practitioners.
- To develop training programmes for practitioners.
- To disseminate findings to the wider community, parents and practitioners.

The research aims to tease out how this is being implemented in a limited sample of settings in Leicester City and the county of Leicestershire. Initially an overview of settings' perceptions on their role in the development of cultural identity will be sought. In addition to parents' and practitioners' views, children will make their own contribution to the research by participant observation by the researcher, and the cultural environment of the setting assessed. Practitioners will also be observed and their personal experience of cultural awareness recorded.

This research is apt at a time when the United Kingdom is becoming increasingly diverse, with the proportion of white people having decreased from 93% in 2001 to 90% in 2007 (Dunnell 2008: 4). There is variation across the United Kingdom, with 'primary school age children in 2007 showing a greater degree of ethnic diversity than the total population' which in England is 19% of children in maintained schools from non-white ethnic groups.

Resources

The UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) stresses that, in order to promote the well-being, growth and development of children, all children, regardless of their social position, 'race', colour, sex, language, religion, culture, or ethnicity, must be provided with the appropriate resources, support, and wherewithal. The UNCRC also advocates the provision of positive life experiences for all children as a strategy for reducing the psychological and social risks that some of them face. Article 8 undertakes to 'respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity' (Newell 1991: 161) and in the context of this research, this will be partially through the resources in the setting.

Educational resource suppliers in the 1990s presented what they defined as 'multi-cultural resources' as a separate section in their catalogues. They rarely do so now, not because the resources are not there, rather because cultural representation is now integrated throughout the product range. This is a welcome step forward. Manufacturers are increasingly adding multicultural resources to their stock and this can only be in the best interests of the children, from both an identity perspective and an understanding of others. Multi-cultural resources on their own are not sufficient; practitioners need to offer a supportive anti-discriminatory environment. Brown (1998: 65) reiterates that it is not the resources that are the critical issue it is '*how they are used*'. Children need to value the difference between themselves and their peers, accepting others for who they are and not judging by looks, clothes or lifestyles.

Persona Dolls are becoming increasingly well known in the United Kingdom, having been available in Australia and the United States of America for many years. These dolls are not toys, rather they are tools for supporting identity, confidence and self-esteem, and encouraging sensitivity, empathy and respect. Indicating the European Project, 'Persona Dolls: education without prejudice', Brown (2001: XII) makes the following statement identifying their value:

We believe that children are likely to pick up prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory behaviour wherever they live. If their perceptions of people who are different from themselves are based on stereotypical thinking they will probably retain this misinformation, unless positive steps are taken to counter this learning. What they learn when they are young crucially influences their relationships, their academic progress, and their future life.

The concept of Persona Dolls is that these large soft-bodied dressed dolls are given names and individual personalities which the children can relate to. They are given families, maybe speak a community language, live in an identified local location, and have mutual friends and acquaintances with the children. Over time their personality develops, children discuss issues concerning them through

stories and situations, problem solving and decision making. The dolls can be given certain attributes like glasses or a hearing aid, be tall, short, fat, thin, and represent different ethnicities by having different skin tones, features, and hair. Children become empowered. They are not treated frivolously but come to be accepted almost within the peer group. Brown (2001: XIV) asserts that, in line with the teachings of Denman-Sparks (1989), the dolls encourage children to 'feel good about themselves and their own culture, while respecting other children and appreciating their cultures', and helps them 'unlearn prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory behaviour'. This is within a story-telling context in which children identify with the doll which reduces 'ridicule and feelings of superiority while promoting self respect, ... self worth and a secure cultural identity', and provides opportunities for analysis of issues and flexible thought. Practitioners are taught how to use the dolls, to introduce the character a little at a time by telling their personal story. Each story will be tailored to that group of children and, as it develops, topics pertinent to individuals or the group as a whole will be introduced. This can be around racism, unwanted behaviour, fear, bullying, world events like disasters or wars, disability, or refugees and, as described in by the Early Childhood Education Forum's words (1998: 14), allowing the children 'to be assertive and learning to challenge stereotypes'. Children are encouraged to develop the story, to be active participants. For children with minimal English, a translator could ensure children understand and can participate in the stories. Alternatively 'key words from the children's languages could be woven into the stories' as described by Brown. (2001: 670) As with all other aspects of life, culture plays an important part in when and how children and adults participate. Brown (2001:60) illustrates this by noting:

During the storytelling sessions we need to appreciate that there are cultural differences in what is considered to be an acceptable physical distance between one person and another. We also need to be aware that the body language young children from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds are learning might be different from our own. For example, if we have learnt to associate looking 'straight-in-the-eye' frankness and honesty we run the risk of misinterpreting children's non-verbal communication. Many Black children are taught that to do so is disrespectful and impolite

Every resource – jig-saw puzzles, games, books, posters, dolls, puppets, small-play people, toys, craft activities – where people are represented, should reflect society as a whole. Consideration should be given to white minorities too, like gypsies and travellers. It is important to make an appropriate selection of people from different cultures when buying these products, and have skin-toned paper, pencils, paint, or crayons when using art and craft materials. BME children, and other minorities, cannot feel valued if they feel invisible, and white children cannot place a value on others, if they do not see them. Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000: 85) raise the issue of perception 'how their (early years' practitioners) service is perceived by people from diverse backgrounds'.

The presence of ethnically diverse dolls for representational and imaginative play and depictions of ethnically diverse children and families in pictures and play equipment, is a prerequisite to children developing a healthy cultural identity. Dolls are representations of ourselves. Thomas (1999:69) cites an example of a nursery where one quarter of the children are Black or Asian but there were no black dolls or other representative materials. This affected self-image: whiteness was seen as favourable, and the Black and Asian children regarded themselves as invisible. He asserts that 'by having greater access to images of themselves, black children might achieve a greater degree of self-love'. It is not necessarily what children do with the resources, it is the fact they are there are all, that gives the message of equality. Dolls give the children the opportunity to explore feelings, to ask questions, and to articulate words to express colour and difference.

Doll's house people, small-play figures, Duplo people, in different skin tones, hair colour and styles are available to represent a range of cultures. These should all be integrated into any aspect as small-play in the same way white figures are.

Providing dressing-up clothes from a variety of cultures gives children the opportunity to share experiences, to be accepting of those for whom this is their regular dress, to raise (and to gain sensitive and appropriate answers) to their questions, to have explanations that all cultures have everyday clothes and others worn for special occasions. We live in a rich and diverse world and this should be represented in early years' settings. Culturally presented imaginative play areas, or home corners, add to the children's knowledge that people live in different ways: what is 'normal' for them may be unfamiliar to another, and vice versa.

Attitudes are formed through images, and young children are generally exposed to books, for which there is a huge choice. Many picture books are designed for the international market, so consequently they do not have people depicted, as commercial publishers may think this will limit sales if they show minority ethnic people for whom particular countries have no representation, and they think they will not sell well. Consequently they may have animals or non-human characters which cross the cultural divide. The story-lines however are generally universal and relating to 'race' and culture, bullying and discovery, building self-esteem and addressing issues familiar to all children. These can be used to support children in any setting where this is required. Where illustrations do depict people they should not ridicule or caricature minority ethnic individuals or groups, avoid stereotypical images, ensure white characters are not always in superior roles at the expense of those from diverse backgrounds. Ensure all images are positive ones. Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000: 87) suggest a bi-lingual library for children and parents to share books, tapes and compact discs with the setting. These could be home-made with parents contributing in languages familiar to the children, or alternative languages where children and practitioners can learn something new.

Some music can quite distinctively be associated with different cultures. This could be introduced with the appropriate setting for imaginative play – like an Indian home corner and Indian music, or a Polish home with Polish music.

Songs and finger rhymes can be taught in community languages (Siraj-Blatchford 1994:84). Pound (2005: 202) confirms this view in associating music to cultures:

Music is culturally specific and even young children recognize and enjoy music that has cultural significance. ... cultural awareness is among our earliest memories

A culturally rich environment offering a range of anti-discriminatory play opportunities, with understanding and well-trained practitioners is a right of all the children in our settings.

Key terms

The following selected terms are defined at this point in preference to a discrete glossary. The following definitions are used in this research.

Early Years Foundation Stage definitions (EYFS)(2008: 52-54) are :

Key person - The named member of staff assigned to an individual child to support their development and act as the key point of contact with the child's parents.

Practitioner – Any adult who works with children in a setting.

Setting – Any out-of-home provider of early years provision for children from birth to five, such as childminders, local authority nurseries, nursery or early years centres, children's centres, playgroups, pre-schools, or schools in the independent, private or voluntary sector and maintained schools.

The definition of an 'ethnic group' as given by the Pre-school Learning Alliance (2007: 18) is that:

... it must regard itself, and be regarded by others, as a distinct community by virtue of certain characteristics including:

- A long shared history
- A cultural tradition of its own
- Common geographical origin
- A common language
- A common literature
- A common religion
- A sense of being a minority or being oppressed, within a larger community

For the reasons defined below, where 'race' is used in this thesis it is placed in inverted commas to identify that it is a disputed term that is a convention, used in legislation, and not a description.

A definition of 'race' is given by Lindon (2006: 13) as:

Race: There is no scientific basis for the concept of race. Genetic research has consistently shown a high level of variation within any of the groupings that have been tried. The word is used within equality practice to cover social, rather than genetic, concept of ethnic group.

I employ a broad definition of cultural identity in the context of this research which is:

Children knowing who they are within the context of their culture. This includes ethnicity as identified by the adults involved (parents and practitioners), whether that be white, black, more specific as in Indian or Jewish, and reflecting religious and other perspectives as identified by them. Cultural identity is a very imprecise term; it can encompass an accumulation of lifestyle attributes, social customs, group affiliation, inner beliefs, and concepts generated from our inner selves.' Cultural identity is about belonging. (Meg Jones 2008)

Having a cultural identity is a taken for granted situation. 'We have one. It just is.' (Meg Jones 2004)

Summary of chapter and into the next

In this chapter I have introduced myself, reflected upon the relevance of my background and interest, and indicated the progression of cultural awareness in early years' settings over recent years. The research propositions are outlined and examples given of the early age children become aware of difference, and how they start putting value on difference from the age of three. Resources are identified to help redress any prejudice and negative attitudes that may be creeping into the young child's way of thinking. The chapter ends with key terms referring to definitions used by various agencies and authors.

In the next chapter I review the literature associated with culture and identity formation, where this fits in the development of the child, diversity and professional practice, and cultural identity in the social policy context. I consider the importance of the learning environment and the resources that contribute the development and formation of cultural identity. The practitioner's role in the process is discussed and issues raised in the discussion of 'from multi-culture to diversity', and the impact of language on cultural identity. From this position research questions are identified which are threaded throughout the thesis.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture is not a synonym for ethnicity
Te Whariki (1996)

Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forward
Soren Kierkegaard, Danish Philosopher (1813 – 1855)

In this chapter, through the literature, I explore the key concepts of culture and the formation of identity in young children. There is a wide range of factors presented by different authors as to what cultural influences affect identity, and the social considerations that lead practitioners into implementing positive practice which supports diversity. The social policy context includes early childhood practice and learning, and anti-discriminatory practice. Within the field of early childhood care and education not everyone recognises, or supports the need for considering cultural diversity and examples of this are explored.

In this chapter I examine

- the positions occupied by different authors, approaching this from a sense of those things that have meaning for us, and on which cultural identity is built
- the formation of cultural identity in the developing child
- social policies relating to early childhood and culture
- establishing an appropriate learning environment for the nurturing of a robust cultural identity
- from multi-culturalism to diversity
- good practice, positive experiences, and professional practitioners

The literature review is divided into three sections.

- The first illustrates the various strands of culture and cultural identity as identified in a range of resources. Examples are given of how this impacts on the development of the child in a cultural context. This leads into the first research question which relates to the physical resources in early years' settings, the impact of them, and the role they play in the development of cultural identity in young children.
- The second section illustrates views on practitioners awareness, background, experience and development and the ethos of the early years' setting. The second research question aims to examine how this affects the formation of cultural development in young children in early years' settings.
- The third section relates to professional practice within the settings; what is done, how it is done, what values are placed on it, and how the children respond. The third research question raises the issue of what is conducive to the development of cultural identity in young children in early years settings.

What is culture and cultural identity?

Culture

Culture is a concept approached from many different perspectives. At its simplest it groups communities together through shared values, lifestyles, religious basis, food, clothes, and priorities. Everyone has a culture, although many will be unable to define their own, and look to others to have one. de Haan (1999: 22) states

I take culture to be those features of social practice that sustain and represent practice, and that at the same time are able to reproduce and reconstruct it. ... (She takes the) basic analytical units of culture (or social structure to be): those elements, characteristics, which bear meaning to human activity and at the same time are able to change its meaning (these could be tools, social rules or other social constructs). Meaning is seen as socially agreed upon, legitimate and empowering ways of acting upon and transforming social reality.

Culture gives meaning to our lives, it is not fixed but flexible, adapts to our needs and we adapt to it, and it can give legitimacy to our actions within a particular context. Culture is something we all share as a common heritage, yet differ on; it is interwoven in our lives as the sustaining force that glues a community together. There are no clear definitions of words in regular use like culture, ethnicity and 'race'. There are those who claim culture refers to those who live differently to themselves as in 'other cultures', implying that they themselves do not have a culture. Within a book entitled 'Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity and Culture' the definition given for culture is twofold;

the first the body of knowledge and manners acquired by the individual, while the second describes shared customs, values and beliefs which characterize a given social group' and which are passed down from generation to generation. (Bolaffi et al 2003: 61)

Perhaps because it is hard to define we put our own interpretation on it. There is a common shared use of the term ethnicity without it ever being defined, these words can be heard to be used interchangeably in the community, and academics argue over meaning. It may be used 'as a euphemism for 'race'. ... the idea of ethnicity may be used by commentators who wish to celebrate diversity without confronting the social reality of race and racism' (Bolaffi et al 2003:96). 'Race' is even more problematic. Generally the term 'race' is used to define physical characteristics, it is a form of categorization which generally means skin colour and has little meaning genetically or culturally. Lindon (2006:13) writes 'Race: There is no scientific basis for the concept of race. Genetic research has consistently shown a high level of variation within any of the groupings that have been tried.'

There is a consensus of opinion among academics, researchers, professionals involved in decision making, and practitioners that culture and identity are important factors to address in service delivery. Kwame Owusu-Bempah (2001: 42) encapsulates this when he writes:

Professional practice in today's Britain must reflect the diversity of the population it serves not only in terms of 'race' or ethnicity, but also in terms of culture and cultural practices, including language and religion. Responding to diverse communities is, however, no easy task for

practitioners. While it may be relatively easy for social workers and health care personnel, for example, to learn something of other cultures, it is in the nature of every culture to be complex, dynamic and in a state of flux. That is, practitioners need to be responsive and dynamic in their approach to work with culturally or ethnically diverse populations.

Culture has evolved throughout history in every country. For some who have had little contact with the wider community, perhaps living in relative isolation in remote or inaccessible parts of the world, change has been slower, for others where the influence of other cultures has been more enriching change has been more rapid. Rassool (2004: 238) describes this as

... redefining identities has been part of human experience for as long as people have migrated from one region to another, from one country to another, from one continent to another. The process of adaptation involves a reworking of the norms, behaviours, beliefs and values of the culture of origin. This invariably results in the hybridization of cultures over a period of time, which brings its own sets of contradictions, ambiguities and conflict for individuals and groups experiencing that change.

The changing cultural context and the consequent dynamics of cultural identity are clearly identified here, and the experience of many in the UK today. There are those who bring with them remnants of one culture, transported from the country of origin to a different country, and yet again move on to adapt to another culture, perhaps through several generations. This is the situation for many British citizens who for example had great grandparents migrate from India to settle in Uganda, only to be uprooted again when they were expelled and forced to establish new communities in the UK in the 1970s. The current generations will experience Indian traditions, perhaps not so strongly held in India today, which have been superimposed by African influences, while being exposed to Western culture in their everyday life. The closeness of the family and community will influence certain traditions, but others will weaken. Only in isolation can cultures continue in a generation on generation form.

Donald and Rattansi argued in 1992 (p1) over the previous twenty years the academic study of culture had been profoundly transformed. Where once it was

considered a finite concept, fixed and unmoving, with its traditions and customs, today is seen as fluid and changing as experiences change our lives. No longer a predetermined point, but the development of multiple identities as our contacts widen and expand.

The rethinking of culture in the light of ... experience over recent years undermines the claims and comforts of community understood in terms of a normative identity and tradition, whether that of nation, religion, ethnicity or the 'black experience'. (Donald and Rattansi 1992:5)

It is only in recent years the term 'cultural identity' has been used; previously the term social or racial identity would have been the norm. In her definitions Lindon (2006:14) describes culture and cultural identity as

Culture: describes the particular patterns of behaviour and associated beliefs that are shared by the individuals within a given group. Not all individuals will necessarily follow these patterns in exactly the same way. The term cultural identity is often used where, previously people might have talked of a national identity.

This is a view I only partially share as while there may be a certain resonance with a nation state, culture can be manifest with its consequent cultural identity at a much more micro level. There are many cultures within any nation, and in today's society cultures overlap and may be adopted by large groups of the population, as in Hindu cultures celebrating Christmas or birthdays in an English way. Paradoxically Christmas is not necessarily perceived as an English tradition but a 'universal holiday' (Derman-Sparks 1989:7). With greater exposure to many countries through travel, and ease of access to foodstuffs and artefacts previously only available in their country of origin, many aspects of lifestyle in the UK are shared, and indeed have been assimilated into different cultures. Once fish and chips were known as the national take-away food of the British, but with exposure to other tastes this has now been superseded by curry.

Greene and Hogan (2005:112) express a view which is where culture is evolving and responding to the circumstances in which it finds itself. While many share common values our culture will define us in many aspects of our life.

We define culture as any group that can be differentiated on the basis of its values, beliefs, and practices, its social institutions, and its access to resources. Furthermore, the members of the group should identify themselves as being part of that group, and should attempt to pass on the values, beliefs, and practices to the next generation.

This is a position I can more readily identify with, particularly as they go on to say 'Culture and society are not synonymous, however, and within any society can be found a variety of different cultural groups, given our definition of culture'.(Ibid: 123)

The literature gives a broad overview, and definitions, of what culture means to the many authors. It consists of social rules and norms, organisations that we expect to be there like early years' settings, and the way we do things (de Haan: 1999: 22). She asserts that what we consider to be the 'universal nature of learning processes' are sited within a cultural context.

Cultural changes

Terminology over the years has changed and according to Cohen (1976) cultural membership plays a crucial role in establishing 'personal' identity, although at that time there was no reference to 'cultural' identity. He believes social growth occurs through a process of 'enculturation', which is learning through assimilation of characteristic living patterns and experiences of that culture. He cites religious rites, cooking, arts, and traditional forms of dress. He states (p8), 'through cultural experiences the child learns the behaviours of his (sic) culture'. Another viewpoint is that language reflects culture. However, language is part of culture and it also constitutes culture' (Lixian Jin & Cortazzi – cited Byram & Fleming 1998: 100) A cultural identity is personal identity, with that specific dimension, one cannot exist without the other. With greater awareness of cultural impact so language is changing to accommodate that perspective.

Definitions of identity are examined to establish common elements identified by others. Views on identity have changed over the years, by way of illustration, from a more fixed position as recently as the 1980s, 'Identity - the study of personality, a person's essential, continuous self, the internal, subjective concept of oneself as an individual. Usage here is often qualified; e.g. sex-role identity, racial or group identity etc.' (Reber 1985) to a more fluid approach in 1990s 'Identity is never a fixed core' (Brah 1992:142). Brah (1992:143) goes on to explain that although identities change they do 'assume specific, concrete patterns, as a kaleidoscope, against particular sets of historical and social circumstances.' She continues with 'our cultural identities are simultaneously our cultures in process'. Robinson and Diaz (2006: 78) encourage practitioners to recognise the limitations of cultural pluralism based on the superficial and celebratory, and an understanding that identity is fixed. Cultural awareness, and the recognition of the importance of cultural identity, has grown with the passage of time. In the field of early years this was particularly apparent during the 1990s, with the need for respect of difference and inclusiveness in the under-five setting.

Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality. But it is also about your social relationships, your complex involvement with others, and in the modern world these have become ever more complex and confusing. (Weeks 1990: 88)

Derman-Sparks (1989:X) was an early proponent in her promotion of what was then called an anti-bias curriculum. She describes an anti-bias curriculum as embracing 'an educational philosophy as well as specific techniques and content. It is value based: differences are good: oppressive ideas and behaviors are not.' Derman-Sparks(1989: IX) asserted that:

Children are aware very young that color, language, gender, and physical ability differences are connected with privilege and power. They learn by observing the differences and similarities among people and by absorbing the spoken and unspoken messages about those differences. Racism, sexism, and handicappism have a profound influence on their developing sense of self and others.

Derman-Sparks' philosophy was a powerful forerunner in the challenge of addressing the power relationships between different groups of people. The language has changed but the underlying concepts remain much the same when Robinson and Diaz (2006: 79) write

New ideas and strategies informed by 'frameworks from post-colonial theory, black theory, cultural studies, critical theory and pedagogy disclose the workings of pedagogies of whiteness: the unspoken learnings and teachings surrounding race and ethnicity.

Concern is expressed by Siraj-Blatchford (1995: 45-47) regarding racial equality and the multicultural dimension within the National Curriculum. She has raised the issue that these aspects have slowly been whittled out of the system with each revision. A report written in 1989 to provide teachers with guidance on developing the multi-cultural element of education was never published. Siraj-Blatchford (ibid:46, 47) asserted that there was little training for teachers on the delivery of the National Curriculum for children learning English as a second language, that cutbacks to Section 11 funding which supported children from minority ethnic groups exacerbated the situation further, and that 'no initial or in-service teacher education has been planned to develop teachers' understanding of the racial equality issues'.

Although many teachers may feel overwhelmed by some of this theorizing on identity and difference, I feel it is important to highlight the complexity of identity formation in children, in order to illustrate, for example, why every black child or every girl child will not perceive themselves in the same way. In fact, children from different structurally disadvantaged groups may often hold contradictory positions,

(Siraj-Blatchford 1995:44)

Although thinking has moved on in time since the mid-nineties, more literature is available, and greater support for early years settings, gaps in cultural awareness still exist in many early years settings, particularly in mainly all white areas. Less experienced early years' teachers and practitioners may feel ill prepared to deal with issues around cultural identity and the complexity of its formation.

The concept of cultural identity is diverse, it is something we all have, but is influenced by a number of different factors. Some are intrinsic, learned from immediate carers and assimilated from birth, others are developed through our contact with significant others beyond the home, as the child becomes less dependent and has wider experiences in the community. Differences are only apparent when juxtaposed against a different set of cultural patterns and beliefs. Children may experience challenges to their cultural identity if they are of mixed heritage – mixedness – when the home or extended family background presents with two, or more, distinctive cultures. In the 2001 Census Owen (2007: 5) describes how:

Almost 4% of all under-5s in England and Wales were of mixed origin: one quarter of the minority ethnic population of under-5s were of mixed origin. This is a huge demographic shift in the population

The value of researching one of the earliest environments a child encounters outside the home and family, the childcare and early education provision, is a positive step in identifying factors affecting cultural identity, deemed valuable by practitioners and parents.

While there is a commonly held assertion, based on Piaget's theory, that stages of child development are universal, increasingly developmental psychologists are looking for alternative models (Jahoda 1992, Cole 1992). Woodhead (1999: 38) questions the view that child development is naturally cultural; children are not born in isolation but within a social, historical, and cultural context. Here it is stated:

All environments are culturally constructed, the product of generations of human activity and creativity, mediated by complex belief systems, including about the 'proper' way for children to develop. There is nothing fundamentally natural about modern environments for childcare, either at home or within a pre-school setting.

As more research is undertaken, and a greater interest shown in cultural issues and their impact on the individual, so formerly held absolutes are being reviewed.

We are only just beginning to assess the effect commonly held views, prejudices, and cultural perspectives have on young children. Prejudice means a pre-judgement of a person or group which when negative may result in discrimination. Malik (2003:13) asserts:

Prejudice is not always directed at the same group and different degrees of social prejudice exist among a variety of personality types. As society changes, prejudice changes. For example, during the twentieth century, the main focus of racism in the UK shifted from Jewish people to black people.

The culture of a society has considerable influence on individual prejudices, if one group in society has privileges and others are denied those privileges. Those who are privileged may feel defensive of their position, while those who are not may feel frustrated and disadvantaged.

Woodhead (1999:16) cites examples of cultural interaction and the impact it has on development. 'Trevvarthen (1998: 42) has argued that one of the human infant's most fundamental needs is to become part of the culture', 'Dunn (1988) has revealed how pre-school children achieve social understanding in family contexts ... from a very early age', and Rogoff (1990: 43):

has elaborated a model of 'guided participation' as a framework for examining how children are initiated into cognitive and social skills. Instead of being about how children become competent to participate, it is about how they grow in competence through participation.

Growing awareness of the influences of culture, and its impact on young children, increases the need for a clear understanding of the processes involved in the development of cultural identity. The literature review indicates the importance of this aspect, and the negativity of ignoring culture and its effect on the child's self-esteem.

Positive approaches to anti-discriminatory play are described in some detail in the literature (Siraj-Blatchford 2000, 1994, Brown 1999, Millam 1996, Samuels 1977). This includes acceptance of home language; consideration of cultural values and socialisation processes; inclusion of cultural events throughout the year; and teaching culturally appropriate songs. Also cooking, eating foods

representative of different cultures; using key words in languages familiar to the children; dance and music. Having dolls from different ethnic cultures; puzzles and games showing diversity; a variety of home corners, role-play and dressing up clothes; positive images in books; posters and displays representing cultural diversity; involving parents; and inviting in community visitors all play an important part in recognising cultural differences. Anti-discriminatory play, activities which promote an awareness of feelings about themselves and others, is good practice. According to Brown (1998):

The aim of those activities is to cultivate our own and other's self-esteem. From small beginnings in the Early Years we can work to bring about changes that can have positive and far-reaching consequences for children and their families.

Hyder (1999) states 'good anti-racist practice benefits everyone by ensuring that all young children develop positive self-awareness and positive attitudes to others'. Good practice is reinforced in the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (2000:18) directing practitioners to 'use materials that positively reflect diversity and are free from discrimination and stereotyping.' Increasingly, contemporary early years' literature and magazines and the availability of practical resources are supporting good practice, but it does not always reach the people most closely involved - the practitioners.

The literature shows that practice reflecting cultural diversity in some early years' settings is inadequate. Some of criticisms of practice indicate 'that providing positive images and avoiding discriminatory practice was an area in which most nurseries had scope for improvement' (Vernon and Smith 1994). Equal opportunity and anti-discriminatory policies are often written by the corporate organisations and there is very little 'ownership' by individual nursery practitioners. Cultural awareness and anti-discriminatory practice is not always an integral part of the curriculum with little use of planned materials. Cultural diversity and ethnic awareness had only minimal representation in the range of toys and play equipment offered in the nurseries studied. Sometimes non-

positive images of black people were portrayed in the form of photographs from developing countries showing menial tasks being undertaken, with no counterbalances. Many celebrations of festivals are limited to occasional 'exotic' representations, or English traditions because 'there are not many multicultural children in the nursery' (Vernon and Smith 1994:102). Although the term 'institutionalised racism' as defined in the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry has not been directed at under-five settings the principles apply to the examples described above.

Institutional racism' consists of the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or demonstrated in processes, attitudes and behaviour ... and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.

(Macpherson 1999: para 47.12)

Siraj-Blatchford (2000) gives examples of discriminatory practice summarised as: treating all children as 'the same', not considering resources, blaming parents for children 'not fitting in', inflexible curriculum, avoiding parents who have difficulty with English, little understanding of issues of equality, inadequate policies, and consider English the only appropriate medium in the setting. She also states (1994:70) that 'the most important place to develop racial equality care and education is in largely white areas'. Having worked in childcare and education for many years in rural areas, in multicultural inner cities, and outer city areas there is, in my experience, more cultural awareness in the inner city where coming into contact on a daily basis with a diverse group of people makes individuals more aware of differences. Practitioners recruited from the largely white suburbs, only a few miles from the city centre, often only had a rudimentary awareness of cultural diversity, sufficient to tick a box saying 'multicultural aims met in their setting' without any real understanding of the issues. The approach to adopt is summed up by the Zimbabwean proverb 'Children are different from each other; therefore they should be treated as individuals'.

Having assessed the literature relating to culture and cultural identity and resources within early years' settings one question I want to explore relates to the specific factors in the cultural environment which support the development of cultural identity.

The developing child

There is no permanent and essential nature of childhood. The idea of childhood is defined differently in every culture, in every time period, in every political climate, in every economic era, in every social context. Our everyday assumption that the childhood we "know" is and always has been *the* definition of childhood turns out to be false. (Hatch 1995:118)

Research suggests children develop a firm understanding in cultural, linguistic, and gender terms of who they are between the ages of three and five (Shaffer 1994: 214). Derman Sparks (1989:2) and Milner's (1983:14) findings show three-year-olds noticing difference in skin colour, and attaching positive and negative values to it between two and five, and Millam (1996:6) cites research by Vaughan demonstrating three-year-olds showing signs of racial prejudice.

According to Milner (1983: 14), white majority group children in a multiracial society show evidence of being aware of simple racial differences from a very early age. From three years old they begin to show feelings about these other groups. These evaluations are confirmed by others around them as well as other influences. By the age of five they may voice these attitudes as they begin to understand the social roles of whites and blacks. This is likely to reproduce versions of adult stereotypes, thus perpetuating racism.

According to Hyder (1999:17) 'Black children may reject aspects of their identity, for instance, by identifying themselves as white'. Children start asking questions about observable differences before the age of three (Samuels 1977) so it is imperative that there is early recognition and open discussion about differences, values, and feelings.

Children are so open and accepting of people and experiences. They don't judge a person or difference as bad unless taught or influenced to do that. If encouraged to retain their openness and acceptance, they won't have a problem with caring for and appreciating peers of other colors. Colors are interesting and fun. When bias is absent colors do not determine a person's worth or goodness. Children have that wonderful natural ability to believe that whatever new thing they encounter is probably good unless proven otherwise. In this regard they know more than we do and we don't help them by teaching otherwise.

(Powell Hopson et al 1993: 141)

There are many inter-linked aspects to identity, each domain a substantial subject in its own right. These include social identity, psychological identity, contextual identity, physical identity, geographical identity, linguistic identity, ethnic identity, political identity, and cultural identity. Exploration of identity can come from any or all of these aspects.

Hall (1992) identifies three main views on cultural identity – Enlightenment, Sociological, and Post-modern. The Enlightenment perspective, which he sees as the traditionalist approach, assumes we are born, live our lives, and die secure in our knowledge of who we are within the cultural context. It assumes a more local and static state which becomes the central core of our being. The Sociological perspective assumes identity is influenced by its contact with significant others and is therefore formed by the interaction between 'self and society', whereas the Post-modern view is that identity is a 'moveable feast' which changes according to the circumstances. This view takes account of the contemporary world where societies are more dynamic, interacting with each other, changing and evolving. Identity is a complex concept. The literature confirms that society is instrumental in the formation of social identity, of which cultural identity is part, evolving and adapting according to the circumstances and situations in which individuals find themselves. Hall (1996:4) asserts that

identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions.

Hall (1992: 232) describes how culture influences society, and how in the variety of social settings individuals find themselves in, it requires cultural identity to be flexible to fit the specifics of the situation. Identity is formed by experience and has no will of its own. Hall and du Gay (1996:4) describe this as 'identities are constructed through, not outside, difference'. Hall and du Gay (ibid: 2) reiterate the conceptual difficulties of understanding what identity is:

Identification turns out to be one of the least well-understood concepts..... In common sense language, identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation.

These shared characteristics, solidarity, and allegiance I am describing as culture, and in the young child, with increasing awareness of their surroundings and interaction with others, the development of their cultural identity.

Tanno and Gonzalez (1998:3) assert

'Identity is about the 'I' and the 'we'. It is about the rituals and rules, the idioms and ideologies, and the language and experiences of the multiple 'I's and 'we's. Such is the complexity and the richness of identity.'

Identity is initially formed by its contact with significant others in the early years, and as children develop assumes a more fluid manifestation depending on the circumstances in which they find themselves. In the self-questioning of identity and the asking of 'who am I?' research shows that it comes within the teenage years.

There is now a great deal of research evidence of racial inequality, at a structural level in education. At other levels, such as racial identity, culture and agency there is only an emerging literature, and most of this has been about secondary school children..... There has, nevertheless, been some passing recognition in British education of identity as an important concept for bilingual and ethnic minority children. The link has been made between language, culture and identity.

(Siraj-Blatchford 1995: 43)

Identity is embedded in culture and the dynamic view in regard to culture in the early years is supported by Siraj-Blatchford (1994:28) 'Culture in any society is learned. It contributes to the behaviour, values, attitudes and beliefs we hold. Culture, like language, is dynamic and ever changing.' Confirming this stance is Haines (1998: 276) when he says

Societies and cultures are dynamic and change over time, but must also reproduce themselves. The idea of change is in tension with the maintenance of broad social structures and the detail of cultural forms that also contribute to personal identity.

This view is emphasised by Hughes and Mac Naughton, in Grieshaber and Cannella (2001: 122), stressing that the formation of identity in children, and particularly pertinent to this research in early childhood settings, is:

their beginning point is that individuals are inseparable from social institutions; they do not simply interact but are interdependent and mutually constituting. Individuals are born into already-existing social worlds consisting of social structures, social processes, and social meanings. The individual does not and cannot exist outside of the social, nor can the social exist over and above the individual.

The nature of identity is about belonging, and while many of the references express this in different ways a common theme is that it is complex, it defines the individual, it is not a fixed 'once and for all' situation, but is evolving and refining all the time.

Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality. But it is also about your social relationships, your complex involvement with others, and in the modern world these have become ever more complex and confusing. (Weeks: 1990: 88)

One common factor is the emphasis on the importance of identity, of which cultural identity is part, and that in the words of Roberts (2002:111) 'Everybody needs the feeling that they are accepted, understood and valued'. The evidence suggests that culture is the pivotal factor in the formation of identity. The way we live and speak, how the world is perceived, how we express ourselves, how

open to others we are, how dogmatic we are on issues which may not concern others, are all expressions of our culture. Hall and du Gay (1996:4) assert

Identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being; not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.

Young children are travelling down that time-line of 'becoming', needing the nurturing atmosphere of a supportive environment. Some white people will assert that it is others who have a culture, the common term in early years settings being phrases like 'traditions of other cultures', or 'representation of other cultures'. This can be construed as being exclusive in that members of the minority ethnic population have a culture, but white people do not, when it is intended to be inclusive as in 'yours and other cultures'. They will assert that everyone has an identity, but not everyone has a culture. Yet culture is so integral to identity it makes us what we are.

Identities are not neutral. Behind the quest for identity are different, and often conflicting values. By saying who we are, we are also striving to express what we are, what we believe and what we desire. The problem is these beliefs, needs and desires are often patently in conflict, not only between different communities but also within individuals themselves.

(Weeks: 1990: 89)

Cultural identity

The assimilation of a cultural identity is part of the socialisation process. Objectively the concept of culture is that of diversity, distinctive differences, observable and defined. Each individual has one or more cultural identities, and there may be many different cultures in a community. How we behave in one setting may be different to how we behave in another. There is for example potentially a family culture, a peer culture, a school or work culture, a street culture, a religious community culture, maybe a recreational culture, with variations within each setting. The connection of multiple cultures link together,

supporting one another, adding interest and a pattern to our lives. Davies, in Grieshaber and Cannella (2001:122), defines multiple identities as having many facets 'including gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, ability, and geographical location'. These identities are potentially contradictory and may conflict with each other. They are dynamic 'never complete and fixed, but always changing and in the process being formed'. Brah (1992: 142) asserts that 'our cultural identities are simultaneously our cultures in process'. In the context of the culture of childhood James and James (2004: 41) refer to the complexities of the subject.

The identity of 'the child' is, on the one hand, a transient identity for the individual, simply a passing-through en route to adulthood. On the other hand, through the institutionalisation of childhood it represents a potentially more enduring mode of identification that is informed by sets of continuities and discontinuities in the discourses and cultural determinants that have come to shape it.

This, they state, occurs at both the macro level of the collective, structural and institutional, as well as the micro context of everyday life within the family. So factors, which influence the formation of cultural identity, are wide and varied, including society's position on childhood. This is why this research is so pertinent. Assessing the factors which impinge on cultural identity in early childhood, devising patterns of good practice, and their subsequent implementation, all goes to increase the self-esteem of young children in feeling confident within the context of their identity.

The literature search has revealed a body of work relating to cultural identity as it relates to young people and adults (Donald et al 1992 :90 -1, Madge 2001: 16 – 18) and particularly in relation to 'race'. There is limited reference to cultural identity and very young children. Siraj-Blatchford (2000:7) refers to this in the context of perception within curriculum development, and the hierarchy placed on certain cultural groups as perceived by both children and adults. Young children gain their cues of behaviour from significant adults. If, for example, white people show preference over black, or boys over girls, or Christian festivals take precedence over Muslim and other non-Christian faiths a hierarchy is established

which the children absorb. As this research is specifically related to young children, cultural identity needs teasing out within the literature, for example as it relates to concepts of multiculturalism and anti-discriminatory play.

Cultural identity is an imprecise term; it can represent an accumulation of lifestyle attributes, home and family, social customs, group affiliation, inner beliefs, and ideas generated from our inner selves. These experiences, surrounding us in our early life are taken for granted yet powerful influences in the formation of being who we are. From this diverse collection of notions develops our self-identity; who we feel we are, with whom we have rapport, and where we feel we belong. Jenkins (2002: 68) in reference to identification says it is

to know who we are and how we know who others are ... simultaneously a matter of behaviour (what humans do) and of how that is understood by ourselves and others (meaning).

Definitions of cultural identity vary according to the author, each one a little different to the last, but agreeing that it is a sense of belonging, of a personal history, of who we are.

Cultural identity is that component of the self which is concerned with one's sense of embeddedness in one's family past, present and future and one's place in the wider cultural milieu.

(Keats 1997:87)

Knowing who you are, where you come from, and where you are going are important components.

There are at least two different ways of thinking about 'cultural identity'. The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common.

This second position recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather – since history has intervened – 'what we have become'. Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'.

(Hall 1990: 223, 225)

I use the analogy of a cut diamond in a ring; it has many facets reflecting different aspects of life, with the gem held fast in the clasp, which represents society, and the point of the stone deep within the setting as the cultural self. From a central core of 'self identity' each individual interacts with others, significant adults, and community members, being influenced by, and presenting, differences attributed to culture. This view is supported by Hall et al (1992: 274) who refer to differences within ethnic groups and that 'in the very act of identifying ourselves as one thing, we simultaneously distance ourselves from something else' and that there are often contradictions within categories. Working holistically with children, recognising cultural diversity, and educating peers and significant adults is a long-term investment. Attitudes are not developed or changed over-night, people need to get used to new ideas, have to be convinced that they are valid, need to work through their implementation, and it could be many months or years before the effects are integrated into their everyday life. Using the analogy of the faceted diamond also suggests the attribute of reflectiveness, as a diamond glitters and shines light outwards for others to see. When it catches the light a prism of colour is scattered around the room, falling on others, giving value to the diamond as a strong cultural identity gives value to the child.

Unless we have an awareness of the unseen pieces in the jigsaw of a child's life, we may not be especially effective, helpful or reassuring to that child. This is particularly important for children who are meeting adults from different cultures than their own and for children with special needs. All children need continuity and co-ordination; but the more adults there are involved with the child, and the more diverse they are, the more urgent this becomes. (Roberts:2002:115)

One aspect of identity, social identity, encompasses cultural identity and this is to be expanded and defined in this research. The definition offered by Byram & Fleming (1998:7) is the starting point,

Each person has a number of social identities, social groups to which they belong, and cultures, cultural practices, beliefs and values to which they subscribe. Which identity is dominant in a given interaction depends on a number of factors in the situation: the language in use, the relationship with the other, how the participants identify each other.

Hamers and Blanc (2000: 9) argue that

Language behaviour is the product of culture Transmitted from one generation to the next in the socialization process and appropriated by each individual

Cultural identity is a very imprecise term; it can encompass an accumulation of lifestyle attributes, social customs, group affiliation, inner beliefs, and concepts generated from our inner selves. Having considered the various definitions of culture and cultural identity I formulated the definition I shall be using in this research. I employ a broad definition, that of children knowing who they are within the context of their culture. This includes ethnicity as identified by the adults involved (parents and practitioners), whether that be white, black, more specific as in Indian or Jewish, and reflecting religious and other perspectives as identified by them. Cultural identity is about belonging.

Cultural Identity in Early Childhood: a Critical Review of the Social Policy Context

Social Policy both reflects and leads society. This is true of the status of childhood as of cultural identity of the child.

Policy making (is) fundamental, not merely to the fact of social categorisation but to the very particularity of any categorisation by, for example, setting out the cultural values and moralities associated with the social ranking of personhood and status. Within any conditions of possibility and the areas of restraint through which meanings are given to social practice and, ultimately, to ideas of the person. Thus, one of the ways in which people come to know not only their own social place and selves but also those of others is, in effect, through experiencing the process and outcomes of policy as it shapes and reshapes the humdrum pattern of their everyday lives. And it is in these everyday encounters that people's identities as this or that kind of person are revealed, taken on, negotiated or rejected. (James and James 2004: 45)

The position of equality, diversity, and acceptance, in work with young children in the UK is supported by legislation and government guidance. The Acts of Parliament with most influence are the Race Relations Act 1976, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, to a lesser degree the Education Reform Act

1988 and most significantly for this research the recognition of culture and the young child in The Children Act 1989. There is also the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (ratified in the UK in 1995), The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and its recommendations (1999), Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership guidance, government circulars, The Children Act 2004 with its appointment of the Children's Commissioner, and the Childcare Act 2006 for England and Wales through which the Ten-Year Strategy was announced from 2008, and has seen through the implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage (2007, updated 2008). Currently the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, The Human Rights Act 1998, and the Commission of Human Rights also uphold delivery of race equality for Racial Equality Standards. The Children Act 1989 was the first major piece of British legislation to recognise and value the importance of the cultural dimension of a child's life. This saw the movement of commitment on the part of a few people to a regulation for everyone working with young children. HMSO (1991: 34)

Children from a very young age learn about different races and cultures including religion and languages and will be capable of assigning different values to them.

The Education Reform Act (1988) indicates support for 'a balanced and broadly based curriculum' and 'promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at school and of society'. However due to pressures of the national curriculum, and rights of parents to withdraw children from assemblies that are 'broadly of a Christian character', Siraj-Blatchford (1994:140) claims this is disadvantaging the youngest children in schools. Her contention is that this denies children a multi-faith approach with its associated acceptance of diversity. She feels 'we are in danger of losing sight of other qualities, such as the social and emotional well-being of people, the importance of the environment, or the aesthetic and spiritual needs of human beings'. Although not specifically targeted at under-fives Recommendation 67 of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry states:

That consideration be given to amendment of the National Curriculum aimed at valuing cultural diversity and preventing racism, in order better to reflect the needs of a diverse society. (Macpherson 1999: 334)

So while directives are given within education to support cultural diversity this is not always reflected in practice. Discussed later in this section are examples of inadequate recognition of the cultural diversity of society and the need for practical influences and appropriate attitudes in early years' provision. The most recent debate is on religious discrimination, with the Anti-terrorism Act 2001, with particular reference to incitement to religious hatred. While not being specific to early years the underlying principles of all race equality legislation is important in the delivery of services to under-fives.

Laws, and related government guidance, are a response to issues within society. Apart from small pockets of good practice awareness of cultural diversity and multiculturalism began to grow in the 1980s. Consultation for the Children Act 1989 set in motion a movement, initiated by the registration officers who would be responsible for registering provision when the Act came into force, in preparing groups for aspects not previously addressed. The implementation of the Act in 1991 had a significant effect on valuing diversity and challenging inequality. According to Burgess-Macey and Crichlow (1996: 24)

Children's cultural, linguistic, class and gender backgrounds are not an optional extra for early years practitioners to consider. Rather they are central to an understanding of the child's development and achievement, and to the development of a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum.

The Children Act 1989: 32 recognises that the importance of values derived from 'different backgrounds – racial, cultural, religious and linguistic – should be recognised and respected'. The Act goes on to explain that very young children learn about others and place different values on them. It emphasizes the need for positive practices to develop positive attitudes from an early age. This is reinforced in The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:

- Article 2 Rights without discrimination

1. the States Parties to the present Convention shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in this Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

- Article 29 Aims of education

1c. the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own; (UNICEF online)

The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society - in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin - is a principle throughout the Convention.

To provide a strategic approach to childcare and early years each area of the country has, under government directive, Early Years Teams (under different titles) to support early years care and education. Prior to this Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) were established. A statement in the Equal Opportunities section of the 1999 – 2000 planning guidance requires that the EYDCP should 'offer equal opportunities to children and appropriate places for families from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds' and to show how they intend to cover their needs (DfEE 1998). Lane (1999: 46) argues that it was in the early eighties that equality of opportunity gained importance in the pre-school years. A growing awareness of good practice means access to provision, and a reduction of discrimination, is now on the national agenda. This principle was incorporated into the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority: Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage 2000:14

No child should be excluded or disadvantaged because of ethnicity, culture or religion, home language, family background, special educational needs, disability, gender or ability.

The Race Relations Act (1976) and Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) target specific areas of discrimination on racial grounds and refers explicitly to 'race', colour, nationality, citizenship, and ethnic or national origins. The areas of specific reference to early years are direct discrimination by treating people less favourably on racial grounds; indirect discrimination by applying conditions which particularly affects a racial group; victimisation by treating differently because a complaint has been made under the Race Relations Act (1976); and segregation by separating children, for example, for particular activities on no other grounds than racial identification. The grounds do not include religion, culture or language which are explicitly addressed in the Children Act 1989. A most significant directive, whose application applies as much to cultural identity and early years provision as the police force, comes from the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry (Macpherson 1999: para 6.34):

The collective failure of an organisation to provide appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, through thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson 1999: para 7:42) places more emphasis on the need for early education towards the elimination of racism and states:

How society rids itself of such attitudes is not something we can prescribe, except to stress the need for education and example at the youngest age, and an overall attitude of 'zero tolerance' of racism within our society

One purpose of this research is to identify the means of recognising the value of policies and practices in early years' settings which actively promote an awareness of cultural identity, an understanding of how this can be promoted in the groups, and how this approach reinforces an anti-biased curriculum, and an anti-discriminatory, anti-racist environment.

Various definitions of terminology are used to guide practitioners, usefully defined by members of the Early Childhood Forum in their document *Quality in Diversity in early Learning: a framework for early childhood practitioners* (1998:10):

Challenging prejudice, bias, stereotyping and discrimination: the resources, policies, practices and procedures by which practitioners recognise and confront these major obstacles to equality. Prejudice, bias, stereotyping and discrimination may appear in many forms, on a variety of grounds (including aptitude, ability, ethnicity/racial group, sex/gender, sexuality and social group). Practitioners who challenge these processes take appropriate action against them.

Planning an anti-bias curriculum, where inappropriate concepts are challenged from the earliest stage, is essential to offering anti-discriminatory experiences. The definition of anti-bias curriculum given in *Quality in Action* (Ministry of Education 1998:87) is:

a curriculum that emphasises an unprejudiced, inclusive way of working with people, situations, and challenges, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, special abilities, and beliefs.

Various researchers, as described by Keats (1997), have investigated the formation of cultural identity. Research with Thai, Australian, Maori, White New Zealanders, and South African children are described. Mostly this is with older children than the ones in this research project. Where different play resources, like ethnically diverse dolls, jigsaws, and pictures of children, and statement tests have been used, children under five years old demonstrate numerous matching like-with-like errors. Keats (1997:96) states:

As the child's understanding increases with age, there is a greater understanding of who one is and how this identity is embedded in one's culture. However, these ideas are ill formed at first, and their development is influenced by the attitudes of significant others.

Keats (1997:96) cites Aboud and Skerry's (1984) work on three stages of development in regard to ethnic attitudes as having some relevance for the development of concepts of cultural identity.

In the first stage the child is mainly concerned with self-identification and self-evaluation. Other group members are not identified in ethnic terms but only as being different from oneself. In the second stage the child is mainly concerned with being a group member and other group members are seen only as belonging to another group. There is an emphasis on between-group differences and similarities and social rules which determine how to react to members of other groups. In the third stage there is again an emphasis on oneself and individuals but the child's perspective has become more differentiated, with reactions to others based on individuals rather than his or her group membership. Aboud and Skerry point out that not all people achieve this third stage.

Much of the current legislation and practice guidance is built on what went before, so although some of the above documents are no longer current they have formed the basis of today's practice in early years' settings.

The literature review has explored definitions of culture and cultural identity, of the development of children and use of resources, the value of informed practitioners in their knowledge and understanding, and how professional practice is identified.

This discussion leads on to how practitioners and parents view cultural identity today, whether they have influence over the development of cultural identity in young children, and what they see as significant within an early years' setting to assist that development. This section raises the first research question.

Research Question 1

What do practitioners and parents identify as specific factors in the cultural environment of the early years setting which support the development of cultural identity of young children?

What values contribute to a positive cultural identity?

Diversity and Professional Practice

Celebrating festivals is 'safe' territory; considering children as groups of 'minority ethnic' representatives, and judging all black children and communities as a homogenous whole, is not helpful or supportive of them. Training and guidance

is required to enable teachers and practitioners to see each as an individual with different needs, backgrounds, expectations, and experiences. Sharing a group experience and developing a social identity may not fill the gap required to develop a cultural identity, particularly if there are not others in the setting who share common ground. Papatheodorou (2007:46), in reference to education, takes the view that when we talk about cultural diversity it can be a divisive factor, rather than bringing a group together. Practitioners need to be alert to the difference between inclusion, integration, and tokenism.

Tokenism ... involves treating the 'culture' of a child's home life as fixed and static. Parent's and children's identities are thereby reduced to their origin by assuming there is something called the 'Magreb culture', 'the Asian way of doing things', or ...' in practice this means that special, yet stereotypical, events or displays are set up for children and families (such as a festival celebrating Iraqi new year with traditional clothes and food). Such activities risk being both patronising and stigmatising, in that they overlook the complexities of children's personal histories and family cultures and ignore socioeconomic and other differences.

(Vandenbroeck 2008: 28)

Woods et al (1999: 168) state that children in the early years do seem to be aware of differences between the religious and cultural groups of their peers. They believe that by being aware of differences children gain an understanding of their own identity, and that 'for the majority of the children their sense of identity in this respect was very clear'. Children who are confused about their cultural identity, perhaps because no one else in the setting shares their background, have a more difficult time feeling comfortable with their peers and developing personal self-esteem.

Gaining and holding on to an identity is not seen as straightforward. Because of the many aspects involved, as described by Roberts (2002:115) as 'jigsaws of a child's life', the development of cultural identity can cause conflict in the individual. The situation is not clear-cut and a child might be confused, trying to conform to one set of norms in the home, and another in the early years setting.

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', within, not outside, representation. This view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term, 'cultural identity', lays claim.

(Hall: 1990: 222)

Epstein (1995:57) uses an analogy of a kaleidoscope to represent children's identities and the various oppressions experienced by them, particularly in this instance gender inequality. It is another example of the complexity of identity formation as described by myself with the analogy of a faceted diamond.

It might, in this context, be helpful to imagine looking through the lens of a kaleidoscope. The pieces inside the kaleidoscope remain the same as the base is twisted, but the exact configuration of what is seen depends on the specific ways in which the pieces fall in relation to the mirrors and the intensity of the light in which they are seen. In a similar way, precisely what is seen in any examination of oppression of any kind will depend on the precise focus of the investigation, but each form of inequality shapes and is, in turn, shaped by others.

I would argue that while it is appropriate to praise a child's achievements, to encourage, boost self-confidence, and support him or her in developing their identity it must also be considered within the wider concept of acceptable behaviour. If children know they are valued for who they are, and develop a positive self-image, this is reflected in a secure sense of identity (Roberts 2002: 105).

Self-esteem is related to our sense of significance and value. However, ideas about helping children to experience themselves as valuable and competent individuals have been open to misconception and trivialisation. For instance, the use of strategies such as habitual empty praise, gold stars, smiley stickers and meaningless statements, are more likely to feed children's self-preoccupation and narcissism than to help them form a genuine sense of their own worth.

... strong self-esteem in children comes from living with people who understand, accept and support them on the basis of reality.

(Roberts: 2002:106)

In the formation of cultural identity and the development of self-esteem care must be taken for children to be confident in their abilities based on genuine circumstances. Praise must recognise defined actions, however small, and be equitably shared with all children. White children need to recognise their own sense of worth within an equitable society, not to grow up feeling superior to those with different coloured skin, different cultural practices, and different approaches. Thomas (1999:75) believes that if this is ignored then as adults we must:

deal with a false sense of confidence because of the positive attributes conferred on their group. If positive selection is done at the expense of other social groups, we are left in an unrealistic position. On discovering this, we have to learn our own true worth, not that which is given to us because of the colour of our skin, our gender, sexuality, able-bodiedness or social class.

Relative positions of cultures within a setting, where they exist, will have an adverse impact on children and the development of their cultural identity. Cultural relativism is when cultures and cultural practices are ranked in a hierarchical position whereby one culture is considered superior to another and implies a comparative approach. This creates divisive practice. Husband (2000: 79), in reference to nursing practice, comments on the difficulties experienced by practitioners taking a cultural relativism stance, resulting in confusion about their own values. Cited in the same work Husband refers to Eriksen's text (1995: 42) that while cultural relativism 'is a valuable tool of anthropological research ...(it is) ... not an essential under-pinning of multicultural policy'. Eriksen argues anthropologists need to take a cultural relativist stance in their work, and use it as a methodology, but have their own views in their private lives. So this is implying that where we judge one view of the world to be socially constructed in a particular way, this is not necessarily the appropriate way to assess diversity. There are many ways of perception, and we need to understand the different cultures in order to best support them.

The relativist position is that there are only truths and no universal truth, versions of reality but no one reality. The point of departure is the well-known fact that cultures are diverse. (Lazar 1998: 20)

Seale (1998: 20) reinforces this position in a citation by Goodman (1982) that 'social science can produce no single 'right' view of the world, but only one of many possible 'versions'.

For guidance a Christian might turn to books. Wigley (2005) advises, from a Christian perspective, on working with the under fives. Despite the chapter sub-heading 'the world of under 5-s: family, childcare and culture' there is very little reference to the cultural diversity experienced by many in the United Kingdom today. In the chapter on family structures there is one reference to the Jewish extended family culture in bible times (Wigley 2005: 28). To a child with dual language, with relatives in the Caribbean, Bangladesh or India he or she may have a greater sense of confusion if their background is ignored as appears to be described by Wigley (2005: 36)

... it is important that they (under 5s) grow up understanding their own community and culture first and foremost. Young children need to develop a sense of who they are and where they come from in order to understand and interpret the wider world. An imbalanced exposure to a 'virtual' world or 'foreign' world may confuse or hinder the growth of 'self'

Children of the same faith but with a different cultural background, children with no faith background, and children of BME communities get no recognition within this Christian context. Two more references within the book mention the words cultural and cultures. The first reference is

... Church D, now serves one of the fastest-growing Muslim populations in the country challenged by huge social, cultural, economic, educational and political changes'. (Wigley 2005: 92)

And the second (Wigley 2005: 94),

... where groups are officially registered they are obliged to work within specified early learning goals that reflect our nation of many faiths and cultures.

but in neither instance are either of these situations mentioned again. The book does contain black and white photographic images of ethnically diverse children as part of the page layout, however they would appear to be photographic agency images. Shah (2007: 112-113) recognises this polarity of groups by saying:

The emphasis on diversity by faith groups varies from one group to another. Some are conservative and fixated on the right way of doing things which has passed down through generations. Others in contrast are much more open and flexible, willing to discover new ways of doing old things and reinventing them

Turner (circa 2002b), also writing from a Christian perspective confirms

All pre-schools ... are expected to conform and comply with the Early Learning Goals, as explained in my article in Newsletter 71. Christian schools are not exempt from this.

She then goes on to identify the range of activities, celebrations, and resources which are acceptable and compatible with the Christian faith. Turner (circa 2002a) cited difficulties experienced when Ofsted, the agency delegated to inspect provision for children, appeared to consider the Early learning Goals

relating to culture and belief to be addressed by celebrating festivals. An example given was the previous week when a Christian playgroup leader, who did not know how to include diversity in a Christian setting, requested advice; she claimed the inspector pleaded with her 'couldn't you just celebrate Diwali?'.

It would appear that this situation is still causing concern. A recent document published by the Commission for Racial Equality which outlines the current state of the United Kingdom 'race' issues sets out the challenges in creating an

integrated society. It makes many recommendations including to Ofsted (CRE 2007:8):

Ofsted through its inspection process, should ensure that early years and childcare services promote racial equality and that inspectors have the appropriate knowledge and skills to be able to assess this.

My own position supported by the literature, in relation to the study of young children, suggests comparisons between cultures is inappropriate:

We should want our children, today and in future generations, to question injustice, intolerance and notions of cultural superiority. We need to start and to sustain that process as early as possible.

(Siraj-Blatchford 1994:62)

A different but complementary stance identified in the literature is the 'politics of difference'. Husband (2000: 81)

...invites us all to recognise difference, and be prepared to treat each other equally through respecting difference. The first task is to understand the difference. And ethnic diversity is always interactive: we are different because I differ from you and you from me. This is an appropriate relativism, for it rejects the distorting normative assumptions of ethnocentrism. From an understanding of the difference we can all then move to demonstrating respect between equals. No one who has isolated themselves from their own identity and values can do this.

Bartlett (1932) in his studies on how we recall new experiences found that where different social groups came into contact with one another, each with its own 'cluster of beliefs, traditions, customs, sentiments and institutions' that each would affect modification. He calls this conventionalisation. Bartlett (1932: 245): states in the act of remembering we try to make sense of what we see based on our experiences, and that 'systems, of culture, undergo change, and finally arrive ... (in) ... accepted forms' This is a useful way of conceptualising culture. We are all trying to make sense of society, common norms we accept without thought, but consistently and constantly we are experiencing new days, new people, and new challenges. For a young child, without the reasoning power of the adult, moving from the comfort of their own culture to a strange and apparently terrifying setting can be overwhelming experience. Practitioners need to be sensitive to these issues.

As a definition in the glossary of Te Whariki, New Zealand's Early Childhood Curriculum, (Ministry of Education 1996:99) 'culture' is described as:

shared understandings and a shared world-view, often expressed in accepted lifestyles and traditions. Joan Metge, in her book, *Te kohao o te ngira: culture and learning* (Learning Media, Wellington, 1990) defines the term as "a system of symbols and meanings, in terms of which a particular group of people make sense of their worlds, communicate with each other, and plan and live their lives." Culture is not a synonym for ethnicity.

Cross-cultural studies

There are many culturally derived variations in how a child develops. Generally these studies refer to children in distinct populations, for example Morocco and Mexico (Wagner and Stevenson: 1982: 105 – 123), Kenya (Super and Harkness: 1998: 39 – 45), some contrasting one country with another, in others research is in a discrete society. Super and Harkness (1998: 38) refer to Japanese mothers spending considerable periods of time soothing and lulling their infants, Ugandan adults and siblings talk and smile to their babies more than in many other cultures, American mothers encouraging expressive assertive behaviour. Zinacantecan mothers of Mexico keeping their infants close, quiet and calm for fear of supernatural threats. So from the very beginning of life culture influences the subsequent development of the child. Even fundamental subjects like mathematics, which might be expected to develop universally along the same lines, is shown by Tymms and Merrell (2004:112) to follow different developmental pathways according to the culture. For example counting systems and methods of recording are different.

Therefore much of what we see and describe as child development is actually culturally determined rather than genetic. Each researcher has a particular perspective and according to Wagner and Stevenson (1982: 106) 'Cross-cultural researchers generally assume that cultural factors are the basis for observed psychological and behavioural differences, which presumably are a function of growing up in (that is, experiencing) a given social and physical environment'.

Attitudes are learned from those around us, they do not come into being at five or fifteen years of age, but are developing from birth onwards. This is the explanation for much undesirable behaviour, like racism, which is learned behaviour. Attempts are being made by Brown (1998, 2001) and others to unlearn undesirable aspects of behaviour, a message reinforced by Nelson Mandela in his inaugural speech as President of South Africa in 1994:

No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart, than its opposite. (Quoted in Brown 1999: 11)

Curricula and learning environments can be multicultural, children are not. Children are individuals with their own culture, which indeed may be a mixture of traditions from more than one culture if for instance one parent is from a white Christian background and one is an Asian Hindu, but then the child's identity would be dominantly as a mixed heritage Christian/ Hindu. As referred to in this research identity is fluid, ever evolving, and borrowing and claiming bits from others, but there will I believe still be dominant recognisable definable cultures in every individual. Book titles can be misleading as in Woods et al (1999) Multicultural Children in the Early Years. Certainly while the early years settings should be multicultural to accommodate all cultures I would challenge the use of the term 'multicultural child'. The dangers are if we do not recognise specific

dominant cultures provision may be so diffuse, not recognising strong beliefs, customs, and traditions, that the child will be unable to define their own culture or those of others. Early years practitioners, in particular, need to have identified cultures on which to build their attitudes and activities to best support the children in their care.

Comparison with others One way in which we come to form a picture of what we are like is to see how we compare to others. Certain aspects of our self-image only take on significance through comparison .. (Argyle 1969: 13)

Practitioners need to be updated on issues relating to their profession; the better trained the workforce the better they are able to deliver, with understanding and sensitivity. It is seen as critical that practitioners in all settings should 'receive ongoing equalities training to raise awareness of religious and cultural issues' relevant to their community (Daycare Trust 2008b: 10). Practitioners need more than training, they also must have the confidence to implement that training, adapt their practice, keep an open mind, listen to parents, and continue with the development.

The learning environment

The child needs to be in the 'right' learning environment in order to develop into a well-rounded person. This is not wholly dependent on material resources but also the attitudes of those with whom they have contact and have influence over them. This process will include the home, any care and education provision, and within the wider community. Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000: 9) believe:

Four main conditions need to be satisfied for learning to take place ...

- the child needs to be in a state of emotional well-being and secure;
- the child needs a positive self-identity and self-esteem;
- the curriculum must be social/ interactional and instructive;
- the child needs to be cognitively engaged.

Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (2000:17) reinforces good practice under the heading Meeting the diverse needs of children by requiring early years practitioners to have:

an awareness and understanding of equal opportunities and meeting needs of children' from all social, cultural and religious backgrounds, children of different ethnic groups ... and children from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

de Haan (1999: 7 -8) asserts:

As in different cultures different ways of acting upon the world are created and stored as artefacts and those artefacts play a central role in the formation of the mind, it follows that learning and development differ from one culture to another. Learning may vary in accordance with the educational efforts or social skills with which individuals are confronted.

Children need a learning environment which is conducive with the positive aspects which build up self-esteem, enabling them to feel confident in who they are. According to Roberts (2002:82) children need comfortable learning zones to grow and develop. They need to take risks, but in a 'safe' manner, to have new experiences, new challenges, based on what has gone before: what they know, and what they can build on. The practitioners need to know how to keep the child safe, what they have done before, and how they learn. It is all part of the cultural understanding needed between practitioner and child. To get the best out of the demands made on children to conform should not be so great that they cannot deal with them. Confidence needs to be built up so they feel they can join in, have equity with their peers, and be valued for who they are. Although referring to the emotional aspects of shyness, anxiety, and laziness what Roberts (2002:84) says in the following statement could equally apply to the development of cultural identity.

Some children who find life overwhelming are thought to be shy, anxious or even lazy. These children cannot seem to get on with things in the way that other children do. They watch a lot, hovering on the edge of other children's activities, either avoiding contact with adults or heavily dependent on them. Sometimes they seem to be oblivious to things

around them and sometimes they will only play with a very few familiar things, unwilling to risk anything. Children need to feel secure in their environment, to have a place, to be visible, integral to, and integrated into the setting.

de Haan (1999: back cover) takes the perspective that learning is culturally located

and questions the universal nature of learning processes and claims that they can only learn by taking into account their cultural context. Each cultural practice creates its own forms of instruction, and learning and teaching are not independent of culture.

New Zealand has a bicultural early years' curriculum, Te Whariki, which recognises the need for cultural inclusivity. All training of early years' practitioners includes cultural diversity and it is commonplace in early years' settings that Maori words should be used, even by non-Maori speakers, so that

children grow up accepting the bicultural, bilingual nature of the country. This enables children:

To grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society.

(Ministry of Education:1996:9)

However by describing the curriculum as bicultural and bilingual raises the question of children whose cultural background is of neither English speaking New Zealander of European descent (Pakeha) nor Maori. While the practice is one of inclusivity, by implication, the State is suggesting a division between the two recognised categories and the smaller percentage of the population from other cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Te Whariki 'explicitly requires early childhood staff to support the use of the Maori language' and culture, although Ritchie (2003: 12) cites practices that are familiar here, when describing a Maori professional who visits a wide range of early childhood centres:

When I look at how they are developing their bicultural awareness within their centres, there is quite a variety of ways, like it can range from tokenism to not understanding what to do, or why are they doing it? (especially when they have got a full roll of Pakeha or Asian students they feel they don't need to) – to those who it's working really well with.

Ritchie (2003: 15) also gives examples of positive practice with teachers describing how:

...during their kindergarten sessions, a frequent occurrence was for Pakeha children to ask them 'What is the Maori word for [an item of interest]?' Children are now aware that there was more than one linguistic and cultural paradigm available to them and were pursuing this new avenue of learning, with support from the teachers, who sometimes needed to guide children through the process of utilising an English/ Maori dictionary to procure the required answer!

It is intended that diverse cultures, including white Pakeha, and referred to as non-Maori should be on one side of the bicultural approach, and Maori on the other. While Maoris deserve recognition, and this is guaranteed under the Treaty of Waitangi, I think to ensure equity the rest of the population should have

greater recognition as a multicultural community. Multiculturalism is not recognised phraseology in Te Whariki (Ministry of Education 1996).

The Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage which leads early years' provision in England, recognises the need for all children to gain a positive self-image, through learning about themselves, their own and other cultures and beliefs, and valuing languages other than English. It is stated that the setting should be 'providing opportunities for play and learning that acknowledge children's particular religious beliefs and cultural backgrounds'. (QCA:2000:28)

There needs to be an awareness by the practitioner of cultural practices as:

Many young children rely on gesture and facial and body language to initiate interaction and express their feelings. These strands continue to be important in achieving successful social communication and emotional development and need to be developed alongside the necessary language. Practitioners should know about and be able to respond to different forms of body language, for example in many cultures casting their eyes down is respectful and should not be interpreted as defiant or sullen.

(QCA:2000:28)

Children communicate in a manner that is acceptable within the home culture, and in the early stages of socialisation these traditions and norms will be continued in early years care and education settings. It takes time, awareness

and exposure to learn the acceptability of alternative actions. Lave and Wenger (1991: 36) describe how communication differs with different cultures, how and when to ask questions, whether the focus is on the child or the adult, the acceptability, or otherwise, of negotiation and sharing, skills and knowledge required:

Cultures and communities differ in the communicational arrangements that exist for children. They may have different suppositions on what proper communication is and what communicative roles adults and children are expected to perform. In other words, they may have different ideas on how intersubjectivity is to be reached and on the identities of children and adults as communicators.

Further to that are examples of play, particularly in the section on Personal, Social and Emotional (PSE) in the QCA document, where guidance is given on children's need to be considered as part of their own cultural community and family, as well as the wider community.

Gaining a knowledge and understanding of their own culture and community helps children develop a sense of belonging and strong self-image. Each child has a culture defined by their community and more uniquely by their family. Role play provides an effective environment where children can explore their own culture and appreciate the similarities and differences in those of others. A positive self-image and high self-esteem gives children the confidence and security to make the most of opportunities, to communicate effectively and to explore the world around them.
(QCA 2000:29)

Language

Language is obviously an important factor for any child and within family life. Children with English as an additional language should be praised, respected, and valued for having this skill and ability. It can be an undervalued asset, or even seen as a 'problem'. The scale of bilingualism or multilingualism is often underestimated, Madge (2001:13, - 14) points out that:

There are 275 languages spoken by children in London (School of Oriental & African Studies, 1997) and it has been estimated that languages other than English are spoken regularly in up to one in three homes. The languages most commonly spoken by children in London

are Bengali, Punjabi, Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, Cantonese and Turkish as well as Mediterranean languages such as Greek, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese. Baker and Eversley (2000) presented further information on language among over 850,000 London pupils. They reported that, overall 68 per cent spoke English as their main language at home, whereas 32 per cent spoke other languages.

Over 43 per cent of pupils in inner London schools, and almost one in four in outer London schools, has English as an additional language

Language is intrinsically linked to cultural identity. Thompson (1993: 140) says to:

take no account of a client's first language can be seen as devaluing that language and indeed the culture of which it forms part and the personal

identity of the client(s) concerned. This is an example of 'ethnocentrism', the tendency to take one's own cultural or ethnic standpoint for granted without reference to other perspectives, thus imposing one's own definitions as the 'norm'.

This also may be perceived as a position of superiority, maybe reflecting a colonial past, where English was the language of authority and heritage languages seen as inferior.

In this country we are particularly bad at learning foreign languages, largely because English is such a universal language. Despite assurances that speaking two or more languages is not only a benefit socially but also expressively, in that 'the different associations of vocabulary in either language, the variety of meanings may give the child an extra breadth of understanding' (Baker 2007: 77) the English are reluctant to learn foreign languages. He explains how identity is tied to language and, depending on circumstances, the child can be bi-cultural identifying with the cultures of the two languages, or rooted in one culture and have a convenient way of communicating with those who speak another language.

Language does not exist in itself but has a use for the overall behaviour which is meaningful in a given culture. Functions of language are universal but the linguistic forms vary across languages and cultures. To some extent language is one of the variables which define culture.
(Hamers and Blanc 2000:8)

Cultural traditions are passed on within families and communities partly through a shared language. Linguistic tradition is therefore part of cultural and ethnic group identity.
(Lindon 2006:65)

New Zealand has a 10-year plan to roll out Early Childhood Centres of Innovation (COIs) in order to build on the learning and teaching of their bicultural curriculum Te Whariki (Ministry of Education 1996), to facilitate research on innovative approaches, and to share knowledge, understanding, and good practice. A'oga Fa'a Samoa, established 20 years ago, was the first licensed Samoan-language early childhood education centre in New Zealand. As a

Centre of Innovation children are immersed in their home language and culture, with staff responding to changing family and community needs. Teachers, management, and others at the centre have recorded their practice.

The centre's focus on identity through language and culture gives Samoan children who attend a strong sense of self so that they have confidence to move into the wider world knowing who they are (Samoans) and what they are (Samoans living in New Zealand). The centre's philosophy reinforces the development of identity within the children's families where many of the parents are of Samoan descent yet grew up in New Zealand in a period when bilingualism was not well supported. (Meade 2005:8)

How can a harmonious bicultural identity be developed? Suggestions (Hamers and Blanc 1989: 124) for balanced 'biculturality' have been: the child should identify positively with both cultural/ ethnic communities; both languages should be perceived as dynamic; and there should be no contradiction in the membership of the two groups. Bi-linguality or multi-linguality are assets to an individual and to a community, but for a small child it can seem particularly confusing and cultural identity takes time to develop. Sometimes bi-lingualism in an individual needs untangling in order to understand their cultural stance. Hamers and Blanc (1989: 11) state:

bilinguals can be distinguished in terms of their cultural identity. A bilingual may identify positively with the two cultural groups that speak his languages and be recognized by each group as a member: in this case he is also *bicultural*. A balanced biculturalism often goes hand in hand with a balanced bilinguality. However, this is not always necessarily the

case: in multilingual societies, for example, a multiple cultural membership can coexist with varying degrees of dominant bilingual competence. A high bilingual competence does not always mean a cultural identity with dual cultural membership: a person may become a fluent bilingual while remaining *monocultural* and identifying culturally with one of the groups only.

Language can bring people together or push them apart, and in this global world where movement of people is greater than ever, it is important for all our cultural identities that we are welcoming to those for whom English is an additional language. It is another factor in the multiple identities we all adopt. Children

benefit greatly from having the ability to understand and speak more than one language as they are more sensitive to communication (Baker 2007: 76), have a greater ability to problem solve as they have more words and thought linkages to consider the situation, and are able to talk to more people.

... language plays an important role in maintaining cultural identity
Brown (2001: 122)

From Multiculturalism to Diversity

it is around the definition and significance of culture that some of the sharpest disagreements and disputes in the field of multiculturalism and antiracism have been expressed. One of the most telling strands in the antiracist critique of multiculturalism in the 1970s and 1980s, for example, was that it suffered from an overemphasis on culture.

Donald and Rattansi (1992:1)

The novelist Fay Weldon, cited in Rutherford (1990: 97) has a particular view of multi-culturalism which has been supported by others. This is that:

Our attempt at multi-culturalism has failed ... The uniculturalist policy of the United States worked, welding its new peoples, from every race, every belief, into a whole. Pluralism is in fact institutionalised rather than obliterated in the USA, and intercommunal strife is not exactly unknown. But the philosophy of assimilation, where differences dissolve in the great 'melting pot' of America, obviously still has a powerful appeal.

...there are many truths in the world; people should have a right to live in the ways that satisfy their needs. (Weeks: 1990: 98)

While there is immense cultural and ethnic variety in the United Kingdom in the domestic and social situation when it comes to national identity we appear to have more in common with our neighbours. In March 2008 a speech was made to the Institute for Public Policy Research by Justice Minister Michael Wills on the 'Politics of identity'. In the speech he stated:

For most of us, our identity is plural. It derives from our personal history, our family and our friendships, our neighbourhood, region and country. Gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity can all shape identity. Few of us feel any one of these characteristics define us exclusively. And their relative importance will ebb and flow over time, in response to changing circumstances.

He went on to describe how earlier in the year, in January, an Ipsos-MORI survey, commissioned by the Ministry of Justice, explored the sources of identity that gave people a sense of belonging. Among the results of 2,000 people interviewed was:

- 45% said they strongly felt a sense of belonging to their religion or faith
- 69% said they strongly felt a sense of belonging to their ethnic group
- 80% said they strongly felt a sense of belonging to Britain
- 75% of black and minority ethnic respondents said they strongly felt a sense of belonging to Britain

What he claimed emerged strongly from these findings is the strength of British identity as a source of belonging. This is true across age, gender, region and ethnicity.

What we need is a process of debate, mutual education, the acceptance of human variety and difference. Bhabha (1990: 208) in his debate on the difference between cultural diversity and cultural difference contends that:

the idea that cultures are diverse and that in some sense the diversity of cultures is a good and positive thing and ought to be encouraged has been known for a long time. It is a commonplace of plural, democratic societies to say that they can encourage and accommodate cultural diversity.

He goes on to describe, what he calls, 'encouragement of cultural diversity and a corresponding containment'. By that he means that the mainstream culture sites the parameters, sets the scene, and providing the minority cultures fit within their vision and norms they are acceptable. He describes it as a 'creation of cultural diversity and a containment of difference'.

The second problem is, as we know very well, that in societies where multiculturalism is encouraged racism is still rampant in various forms. This is because the universalism that paradoxically permits diversity masks ethnocentric norms, values and interests.

Multiculturalism represented an attempt both to respond to and to control the dynamic process of the articulation of cultural difference, administering a consensus based on a norm that propagates cultural diversity.

The difference of cultures cannot be something that can be accommodated within a universalist framework. Different cultures, the difference between cultural practices, the difference in the construction of cultures within different groups, very often set up among and between themselves an incommensurability. (Bhabha 1990: 208)

There is a view, increasingly being expressed, that multiculturalism has failed.

Cultural pluralism approaches draw attention to the facts of linguistic or cultural differences, and the need for sensitivity, but at the same time they obscure, with this emphasis, the historical and contemporary differences of power between white and black populations. The solution to racism becomes cultural understanding and tolerance, and this is seen as the mechanism for change. In this way this approach is idealist: it rests on the assumption that change can come from education or rational argument. Although it attempts to recognize the worth of other cultures, its framework of analysis and prescription for change remains firmly within contemporary and nationalist boundaries.

(Williams 1989: 95)

There is no doubt that multiculturalism will not address all forms of racism, and correct the imbalance of power relationships in society. Other more specific challenges need to be undertaken, including legislation. There is also a belief that multiculturalism creates cultural isolationism, in that it discourages integration of communities. Many from minority ethnic groups live in inner city areas for four reasons. One – with each wave of immigration individuals and families are drawn to join relations and friends already settled in the community, many of whom live in the inner city. Two- coming from a position of disadvantage from poverty or lack of power they have no choice but live in the least expensive accommodation. Three – being with others who speak the same language and follow the same customs offers a sense of security. Four – like-minded community groups, places of worship, and specific cultural support builds up in these areas supporting the community and providing services. What has, and is, happening in the UK is no different to when the English have

settled abroad, as exemplified by the English community in Spain, where they largely gravitate towards other English speakers, where there are restaurants and cafes serving English dishes, have Church services in English, and follow English customs.

By being with others of a similar cultural background, either immediate family or the wider community, is what we call on to inform our self-identity, and the development of our cultural identity. However, as has already been stated, identities are not static, they are not fixed, and they not only change over time but we have multiple identities which operate in different situations in parallel to one another. Fog Olwig and Gullov (2003: 233) offers a positive view of children growing up with multiple identities, if given opportunities to develop healthy emotional literacy, in that as adults they will not be constrained and pigeon-holed by society but will be fully-fledged individuals with control over who they are.

... children ... as they grow up, they may find that their construction of places of identification becomes constricted by the multicultural or ethnic structure of the wider society. This structure ... teach(es) them which place is expected to be their primary site of belonging and identification in society. They are ... likely to discover ... identification ... is located in a geographic elsewhere. This situation raises important issues concerning children's place in multicultural societies. ... it has been argued everybody has the right to his or her own cultural identity. Yet if children operate multiple, shifting identities, ... one should ... 'envisage children as having a right to construct their own cultural identities' ...

This is as Bhabha (1990) describes above as containment of cultural diversity, children are given the freedom to choose, as long as it is acceptable to society.

The literature emphasises the importance of the values and ethos of the practitioners, of professional skills, and informed attitudes, delivered with sensitivity to support the development of cultural identity in young children. Research needs to ask what the relationship is, and the impact this has within the setting in the everyday dealings with the children. This therefore leads to my second question relating to practitioners, and their understanding of cultural acquisition within the context of early years' settings, which supports quality practice.

Research Question 2

How do the values and ethos of practitioners in early years' settings impact in the formation of the cultural identity of young children?

Professional practice in operation

Professional Practice

Practitioners play a crucial part in the emotional well-being of the children being cared for in childcare and early years' settings. Attitudes towards children and their families, the life styles they lead, their customs and culture must be informed and supportive. This requires the recruitment of appropriate individuals with the right attributes and qualities. On-going training is a necessity, not an optional extra, as the more understanding we have of cultures different to our own, the greater the mind is expanded to be accepting of others. Owusu-Bempah (2001: 50) emphasises the need for an anti racism/ anti-discriminatory policy and its effective implementation in all professional organisations involved in the care of BME (black and minority ethnic) communities. This will include early years and childcare. Having awareness of the issues is not a once-and-for-all objective. Owusu-Bempah (2002:50) sums it up:

Individual practitioners must recognise that anti-racism/ anti-discrimination is a process that may change and develop as the needs of the community change and develop. Furthermore, emphases continually alter over time, so what may seem to be a state-of-the-art practice today may become

rather inadequate and dated tomorrow. It also has to be accepted that the issues and ways of dealing with them may change rapidly and unpredictably.

Brown (2001:37) reinforces the message that children learn how to behave in particular ways, and practitioners are in a strong position to 'positively influence attitudes, (and) challenge bias'. She states:

children who experience racist discrimination may need our support to reinforce a strong group and personal identity and prevent their internalising the negative messages they receive from the world around them.

In order to do this, practitioners need to be aware of the impact of oppression and injustice on many peoples lives. Without awareness in the practitioners inadvertent messages can be given to our children and parents, described by (Vandenbroeck 2008: 28) as

Educational practices that foster children's multiple identities need to avoid two pitfalls: colour-blindness and tokenism. Colour-blindness is the denial of differences, very often out of honest concern to treat 'all children equal'. In practice this means that parents and children from minority communities are welcomed, but receive the (unintentional) message that they need to 'adapt' as soon as possible to what is considered 'normal' within the dominant culture.

Learning about other cultures is a two-way process, both children and their families benefit, as does the practitioner. The more we learn the greater our understanding of others and ourselves. Life is enriched. Life-long learning in this field is stated by Owusu-Bempah (2001: 50) in the following statement:

Practitioners must understand the impact of racism on its victims, the aim of the endeavour being to find ways of helping others more effectively. In tandem with this, however, is the possibility of a two-way process in which the practitioner learns not only to practise better with clients or in different cultural milieus, but also more about themselves in their search for personal development. This is integral to the notion of continuing learning and professional development.

The practitioners should be broadly representative of the parent and child population of the setting. This may require some challenging of the status quo to employ a range of diversities of practitioners. 'It is a legitimate aim to create a more diverse pool in which to choose; however, applicants from particular groups must not then get favourable treatment within the short-listing and interview process'. (Lindon 2006: 217)

Currently only 2% of the practitioners are male, and minority ethnic practitioners are in line with the population as a whole. However, the picture is patchy over the country and in localised areas.

The early years profession is far from being a mirror image of the population as at large. Male early years practitioners are the most striking overall minority. Some settings in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods nevertheless have a mainly all 'white' team, although some teams are far more diverse. (Lindon 2006: 216)

We are all individual with our own range of skills and experiences to bring to the job. These can be developed with nurturing and make for a stronger team within the setting. Language skills and cultural experience should not be overlooked.

Everybody brings the sum of their personal experience as well as their accumulated knowledge to their work, in our case, in an early years setting. Staff may well have lived very different lives and had very different experiences from one another and this affects the attitudes and understanding they bring to all aspects of their lives, including their work. (Pre-school Learning Alliance 2007: 40)

Professionals working with young children need to observe, to listen to what is being said, to ask questions, to support, and understand the children in their care. Listening out for the silences as well as the words being used. This may seem an odd thing to say but it is like the proverbial 'elephant in the room', something that everyone is aware of but nobody dare mention in case they say the wrong thing. Silence may indicate oppression, that self-esteem is so low due to repressive practices that the individual is afraid to speak out. To give an anecdotal example of this I relate a personal experience at a small airport in the North-West Frontier Province in Pakistan. I went through security and entered the departure lounge where I broke the first cultural norm and sat down. Looking around I realised the room was full of men. My eyes searched for an indication of a women's section, the only potential being a door along one side of the room. I entered it to find two women, heads covered, and wearing traditional shalwar kameez and entertaining a clutch of toddlers. They were chatting in the local language and ignored me, a white western woman. A fourth woman came in and sat down. She was veiled with only a slit sufficient for her eyes to

be visible. The first two women tried hard to bring her into the conversation, the verbal responses were minimal, so low it was difficult to catch their sound, and her eye lids struggled to raise themselves. After a while the first two women gave up trying and continued with their animated conversation. In contrast a fifth woman, hugely confident, entered wearing expensive shalwar kameez, a scarf fallen from her head draped around her shoulders, with make-up on and high heeled shoes. She also was Pakistani and was returning from honeymoon to Islamabad. She spoke to me excitedly in English, extolling the beauty of the region and delighting in my positive responses. Here were five women all responding in different ways to the cultural norms embedded in their personality. As practitioners it is necessary to know and understand these norms, but also to give the children in their care the tools and confidence, while respecting the traditions, to fulfill their potential in life.

Sometimes we learn from being told, sometimes we learn from observation, sometimes we need to confront the elephant! When working with very young children the silences are often from the children because we either do not ask them, or because they are unable to articulate their opinions. Young children may need time to think of their responses (Brown 2001:45-47) before answering, and by waiting may demonstrate a greater understanding of the subject under discussion than had previously been realised. Silences can also indicate a rejection of the subject matter referred to. Knowing the children well, giving them plenty of time, developing their confidence in the value of their responses, and recognising the limitations of verbal communication help us better to understand the impact of actions on very young children.

Those working with black children need to have a clear understanding of the role and function of the families in which they live in order to make better communication and really understand what the children say.

(Thomas 1999: 68)

In working with young children it is important that cultural differences in the parents are understood and dealt with sensitively. Keats (1997: 83) refers to parents from particular cultures.

It is important to try to understand what is behind the words in conversing with parents from cultures such as Chinese, Japanese, Thai or Indonesian who place great emphasis on smoothness in social communication. In interviews do not take everything said at face value or try to go straight to the issue. Take time to establish a good relationship through appropriate courteous exchanges before approaching any issue of concern. The more delicate the subject to be addressed, the more important these courtesies become.

Assumptions may be made regarding culture unless each child is regarded as an individual, within a familial culturally setting, within the wider community. The role of practitioner is crucial in this respect. Learning about cultures, ones own as well as others, is a life-long objective. It is not a subject which can be covered in a short training course and considered 'done'. Thomas (1999:66) raises the issue of child development theories and their general neglect of children of African or Asian descent.

children need to be thought of specifically, individually and culturally, since the situation and experiences of children in general may not help workers understand those complex relationships that are present in working with children of African or Asian descent. It is my view that children in these cultural groups experience different developmental pathways to the 'standard orthodox child' often mentioned in textbooks or child development schemas. child development theories have never featured the experience of black children in a white society, nor in a multicultural society. Thus a whole range of diversity and difference is often missed.

Parents are important partners in assisting practitioners in gaining knowledge of different cultures and religions. One of the most valuable starting points is to prepare a policy on religion and cultural diversity. Jones (2004: 8 -9) describes the process as needing to be:

drawn up in a sensitive, inclusive, thoughtful manner over a period of time. All staff should be involved in the process so they understand the implications of the statements, are fully supportive of its aims, and feel it

has not been imposed upon them but that it is 'their' policy.

The key to successful implementation of religious and cultural policies is to involve the parents, so they feel confident in what you are offering their children. Consult them during this process to find their views and to consider and alleviate any concerns.

Good Practice and Positive Experiences

In addition to institutional racism described in the Macpherson report other forms exist as in individual racism, where individuals are viewed negatively, and cultural racism, which, according to Owusu-Bempah (2001:43):

Cultural racism consists of the values, beliefs and ideas, usually embedded in our social representation or 'common sense' that endorse or sanction the belief in the superiority of one 'racial' group (white) and its culture or way of life over those of other groups.

Perhaps we underestimate the strength of emotion in a young child. We see the outward signs of tantrums and crying, but may not consider the internal ordering of the outside world and the emotional affect this has on the child.

There cannot be a greater mistake than that of believing that the child is ever too young to be affected by what happens to him (sic). He is often too young to understand it; but he is never too young to feel intensely, though he has no capacity to express in speech the emotions.

(Lewis1962:12)

Owusu-Bempah (2001:48-49) suggests there are many areas to address by

... practitioners to alleviate negative early experiences and structural disadvantages to improve the circumstances of all children, and thereby facilitate their healthy physical, emotional, mental and social development.

He cites four of these areas for consideration: empowerment, early intervention, positive experiences, and rights of children. Empowerment should aim to break down structural barriers to full growth and development, and early intervention, which tackles discrimination, is likely to 'reduce many of the difficulties it causes in children, such as emotional problems, behavioural difficulties and school failure.'

The UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) stresses that, in order to promote the well-being, growth and development of children, all children, regardless of their social position, race, colour, sex, language, religion, culture, or ethnicity, must be provided with the appropriate resources, support, and wherewithal. The UNCRC also advocates the provision of positive life experiences for all children as a strategy for reducing the psychological and social risks that some of them face.

Rights for children related to the principle of positive early experiences is the recognition and acknowledgement that all children have the right to experience those conditions and circumstances which can best contribute to their healthy growth and development. This requires that life chances and opportunities are provided for every child irrespective of differentiating factors.

The implications are that in the interests of all children a holistic approach is required which enables them to reach their full potential and well being physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually. Practitioners play a significant part in this process.

How children see themselves and how they behave as a result of their self-perception are such complex and interrelated aspects of self that it is helpful to find a way of untangling the threads and considering them one at a time. Then it becomes possible to get an idea of what is happening to these threads in individual children.
(Roberts:2002:12)

If children are positive about themselves, then they are more likely to achieve if their self-expectations are correspondingly high asserts Roberts (2002:104).

This section recognises the value practitioners play in the positive development of cultural identity of young children. The literature emphasises the importance of ongoing learning for practitioners to meet the changing needs of the children in their care. There is not a single model of practice applicable in all situations. It is not sufficient to have a one-time training and consider learning about cultural differences as complete. Application of knowledge and understanding by the

practitioners is what is experienced by the children. This leads to the third research question.

Research Question 3

What aspects of the cultural environment in early years setting are conducive to the positive development of cultural identity in young children?

Summary of chapter and into the next

In this chapter the literature is critically reviewed to establish views on identity and its formation. The focus of this research is on the developing child and how diversity and professional practice impact on the concept of the development of cultural identity. Training is the key and application of that training a prerequisite of the healthy emotional development of the child. The variety of languages spoken in this country is staggering, a tremendous force for good if only we could harness it. Speaking more than one language for the mainstream majority in England is unusual in world terms, as estimates of bilingualism world wide is between 60 and 75% (Baker 2007: 186). Language plays an important part in the development and support of cultural identity in young children. There are critics of multi-culturalism; diversity is a fact of life and we must learn the most appropriate way of accommodating that diversity in everyone's interests. Just as identity is not static, so neither must our thinking be, and we need to look at new ways of working together. I examine cultural changes, good practice and positive experiences in the advancement of the quality of provision. Practitioners are increasingly acknowledged as professionals and have a vital role to play in the support and development of the child's cultural identity.

Therefore in summary the three research questions arising from the literature review address different aspects of the development of cultural identity in young children in early years' settings. The first relates the physical resources, the second the practitioner's awareness, background, experience and development, and the third relates to the practice of practitioners.

1. What do practitioners and parents identify as specific factors in the cultural environment of the early years setting which support the development of cultural identity of young children?
2. How do the values and ethos of practitioners in early years' settings impact in the formation of the cultural identity of young children?
3. What aspects of the cultural environment in early years setting are conducive to the positive development of cultural identity in young children?

In the next chapter the methodology of the research is recorded with a discussion paradigms and theoretical perspectives, on the ethics of researching with children, and how the research was designed and piloted. Information is given on the population sample and why the particular location for researching cultural identity in early childhood was made. The research process describes the comprehensive mixed methodology used and the rich source of data collected. A critical reflection on the research is given and an understanding of why it is important to do this research.

The research questions generated from this literature review are carried forward into the methodology and the subsequent data collection, findings, and analysis.

CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Every day you may make progress. Every step may be fruitful. Yet there will stretch out before you an ever-lengthening, ever-ascending, ever-improving path. You know you will never get to the end of the journey. But this, so far from discouraging, only adds to the joy and glory of the climb.
Sir Winston Churchill (1874-1965)

One thousand days to learn; ten thousand days to refine.
Japanese Proverb

Introduction

This chapter describes the purpose of the research, the identification of the population sample, the part ethics played in the research, the paradigm selected, how the pilot was conducted, the planning of the research, the field work data collection, and a reflection on the methodology used.

The term practitioner is used throughout this thesis to refer to staff, or voluntary workers, with direct responsibility for the care and education of young children. As the research proceeded the terminology changed from staff to practitioner. (A number of direct quotes refer to staff and this term has been retained to be true to the original). Where staff are referred to by me it is used as an inclusive term for all personnel in the team working in the setting. Manager is used to denote the person-in-charge of the setting, although they may in reality have different titles. To maintain anonymity, and for the ease of the reader, I define throughout this research the one practitioner with whom I worked in each setting selected for in-depth research the 'named-practitioner'. The terms 'early years' and 'setting' are generic words for day care / education provision for under five year olds in group care i.e. nursery, playgroup, crèche etc., where practitioners are responsible for providing the resources and activities.

Time spent on the research design is of utmost importance to ensure that the research questions are addressed. As indicated in the previous chapter three questions have arisen from the literature review. These are:

4. What do practitioners and parents identify as specific factors in the cultural environment of the early years setting which support the development of cultural identity of young children?
5. How do the values and ethos of practitioners in early years' settings impact in the formation of the cultural identity of young children?
6. What aspects of the cultural environment in early years setting are conducive to the positive development of cultural identity in young children?

I have found that innovative methods of research instrument design can be productive, vast amounts of data generated, and that piloting the research is effective in identifying necessary amendments. The ethical dimension is challenging as established methods of the past are evolving: good research must implicitly be ethical research and for me as a practitioner/ researcher of utmost importance. Growing awareness of the influence of culture, and its impact on young children, increases the need for a clear understanding of the processes involved in the development of cultural identity. Ignoring the influence of culture can negatively affect a child's self-esteem.

In this chapter I describe

- the purpose of the research into the development of cultural identity of young children in early years settings.
- the theoretical perspective of the interpretive paradigm
- the role of ethics in field research with young children
- the research questions and design
- population figures and sample selections
- the implementation of the data collection
- critical reflection on the research

Purpose

Before I continue with the development of the research design and methodology I need to set the context that the research is set in. As a researcher I have a particular perspective through which I view the world. We all view the world through a particular lens; my viewpoint interprets culture in everything I see. I cannot divorce myself from this position, others may see from a different perspective.

Social and psychological researchers conduct empirical research concerning children and young people because they hope that their work will result in real and measurable benefits for children and young people. Benefit might be in terms of an explanation or understanding of children. It might also have specific benefits in particular contexts ...

(Fraser 2004: 15)

By undertaking this social research I anticipate adding to the body of knowledge relating to the development of cultural identity in young children in care and education settings.

Using a complex and comprehensive research design, employing a variety of research methods, the research will consider what current practice is in order to identify good practice in a variety of early years' settings. Recommendations for good practice will help practitioners and others provide an enriched early years' environment which supports the development of cultural identity. To address the research questions there will be a cultural environment audit of the resources available in the setting and their use (Question 1), and the approach, ethos, and attitude of the practitioners, volunteers, students, and parents in the setting will all be examined (Question 2). Differing contexts will be included in the research to demonstrate the divergence of the provision and the applicability of establishing support for the development of cultural identity in all early year's settings (Question 3). The research draws on different disciplines – psychology, sociology, child development, childcare and early education.

Theoretical context

Within the social sciences there are a number of theoretical perspectives each reflecting a particular paradigm. Researchers argue for different approaches to collecting and analysing data, and need to identify which paradigm they are working within.

Positivism assumes an objective world which scientific methods can more or less readily represent and measure, and it seeks to predict and explain causal relations among key variables. Critics argued that positivistic methods strip contexts from meanings in the process of developing quantified measures of phenomena. (Gephart 1999)

This method used in an early years' context would require controlled conditions, possibly a control group of children to compare results, where variables can be measured and the results expressed mathematically.

According to Gephart (1999) the goal of the positivism paradigm is to 'uncover truth and facts as quantitatively specified relations among variables', the goal of interpretivism is to 'describe meanings, understand members' definitions of the situation, examine how objective realities are produced', and the goal of poststructuralism is to 'uncover hidden interests; expose contradictions; enable more informed consciousness; and change'. Miller and Glassner (1997: 100) assert

Research cannot provide the mirror reflection of the social world that positivists strive for, but it may provide access to the meanings people attribute to their experiences and social worlds.

Meyer (accessed 2009) asserts the structuralist paradigm suggests that 'human thought processes is the same in all cultures ... in the form of .. oppositions .. (to) include hot-cold, male-female, culture-nature, raw-cooked.' She states Structuralists argue that these are reflected in various cultural institutions and can be discovered through examining, among other things, myth, language, and cultural expressions. Conversely, she claims, it does not address cultural change. Modifications to the paradigm to form poststructuralism includes a more reflective quality. Poststructuralist Michel Foucault (Jones accessed 2009) agreed that 'language and society were shaped by rule governed systems, but

he disagreed with the structuralists on two counts.’ He did not think there were ‘definite underlying structures that could explain the human condition’ and that it was ‘impossible to step outside of discourse and survey the situation objectively’. He thought there was no objective viewpoint and human nature must be understood in their social and political context. Lye (1996) gives as a general principle of structuralism as ‘meaning occurs through difference’, that it is a study of signs and cultural codes, some of which have larger cultural meanings. He asserts ‘both the self and the unconscious are cultural constructs’ and

In the view of structuralism our knowledge of ‘reality’ is not only coded but also conventional, that is, structured by and through conventions, made up of signs and signifying practices. This is known as ‘the social construction of reality’.
(Lye 1996)

Having considered different theoretical perspectives I feel with my background and experience my preferred choice is interpretivism which will be discussed further in this chapter.

Paradigm

As asserted by Hughes (2001: 31)

A paradigm is a way to ‘see’ the world and organise it into a coherent whole.

I am coming from the perspective of an experienced practitioner with a world view focused on the child, particularly young children, within the family, and wider community. My position agrees with the statement by Packer (2009a) that

Every researcher looks at the world through lenses that are the product of his or her professional development. I view development as a complex interplay between child and culture.

This leads me into ethical realms which recognises the respect of the worth of children as human beings, ‘children are not simply objects, either of concern, of research or of a media story’ (Roberts 2000: 229). Roberts states that children’s experiences have often been the missing link in research, that when they have

been listened to (and I interpret that as referred to in the Reggio Emilia approach (Abbott and Nutbrown 2001: 1) where it is referenced as 'The hundred languages of children' (meaning all forms of communication) research has not always been in the best interests of the child. Children and their environs are my motivation and priority.

We never see the world 'outside' a paradigm (frame). Each of us (not just researchers), always and inevitably, frames the world in the process of seeing it. Consequently, what we learn about the world will depend on how we see it; and how we see it depends on our choice of paradigm.

(Hughes 2001: 31)

As human observers, it is inevitable that our own feelings and interpretations influence what we see or don't see. The behavioural record reflects, to a greater or lesser extent, our 'biases preconceptions and emotional responses' (Nicolson and Shipstead 1998). In other words, we see the world around us through a lens: what I see and how I interpret it may not be the same as what you see, or how you interpret it. We may notice different behaviours, focus on certain events or interactions more than others or simply 'miss' certain behaviours

(Rolfe 2001: 231)

Selection of paradigm

Whichever paradigm is used, and this will depend on the perspective of the researcher, there is inevitably overlap between the theoretical approaches. My approach will be within the interpretive paradigm, and the research design will reflect the practice coming from that perspective. The resulting research is expressed through language rather than by mathematical deduction (positivist position) 'language is much more than just a window on a world that exists independently of it. Instead language *creates* our social world' (Hughes 2001:36). I am conducting the research by recognising that I am not coming from a neutral position, but the research should be as objective as possible through the nature of evidence gathering; this includes what is said and seen and what is recorded.

A critique against the interpretive approach is that it is too open to interpretation, that each researcher will have a different perspective, that there will not be sufficient rigour, that the results could not be replicated, and therefore become

invalid. My aim is to bring into the research recognised subjectivity, and make questions explicit. I maintain that by using the range of research instruments I devise, and the analysis I employ these issues will be addressed, in order to provide validity through triangulation to check the whether the responses are consistent. In my opinion there are no irrefutable laws of nature which can be followed in the social interaction of diverse people. That is why I rejected positivism – early on in the process. It is a question of interaction one with another, and in groups, each individual affecting the actions of the other, and within the setting they find themselves. This therefore requires the researcher to observe the actions and reactions of the participants and attach meaning to emerging patterns, and the anomalies that will inevitably arise through social interaction. I have rejected other theoretical approaches as they do not fit my world view where I am searching for patterns of meaning from an inter-actional perspective, not through objective precisely measurable variables because this is not a social reality I recognise or accept.

Interpretivism

The interpretive approach is an interactive method of collecting and analysing data through a social perspective, on the basis that the participants create meaning by their actions and reactions. It 'seeks to explain how people make sense of their circumstances, that is, of the social world'. (Denscombe 2002:35) Bryman (2001: 13) describes the difference between the positivist view of *explaining* human behaviour as oppose to interpretivism as *understanding* human behaviour.

Interpretivism is taken to denote an alternative to the positivist orthodoxy that has held sway for decades. It is predicated upon the view that a strategy is required that respects the difference between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action. (Bryman 2001: 13)

By using the interpretive approach some would argue that there is a certain amount of uncertainty, although within any social research I would argue that unequivocal objectivity does not exist, that it is a myth.

Buchbinder et al in end-notes (2006: 59) following a discussion on ethnography and participant observation in a naturalistic setting states '*participant observation* and *ethnography* are often used interchangeably ... Participant observation is just one, albeit the primary one, of the many methods used to do ethnography'. This is an example of the 'shift away from the *positivist* approach, which insists that social research be modeled after the physical sciences, and emphasizes the discovery of universal laws and descriptions using neutral observation language.' (Buchbinder et al 2006: 48)

An example of interpretation in social research is given by Gutierrez in that it takes into account what has gone before in order to interpret what is observed now. Children are not blank slates, *tabula rasa*, but bring with them many experiences which can be interpreted through interaction with others.

As individuals, children have memories, experiences, motives, interests and expectations that characterise the way they appear to other people and how they see themselves. In this process, the differences between 'me' and 'others' begin to take shape; in other words, they begin to define their own identity.
(Gutierrez 2008: 24)

Interpretivism requires the same systematic approach as any other method, with well planned and prepared research instruments and rigorous data analysis. The interpretive approach has 'caused social researchers to be more careful, more modest, more tentative about their claims to have produced theories about the social world' (Denscombe 2002: 20). Packer (2009b) sums this up as

Interpretive research is not the norm, practitioners of interpretive researchers are continually being called to justify and explain their approach and its assumptions.

The significant differences between interpretive and traditional research are not in kind of data they work with, but in their underlying assumptions.

Interpretation requires experience of life and the world which I can confidently claim to have, particularly in the area of cultural diversity and cultural identity in young children. As a practitioner having worked with children for over forty years I reject the notion of objectivity in a naturalistic early years' setting.

The researcher has to find an appropriate entry to the culture, and must recognize that one is always already in a culture, which one must struggle to become aware of, both to understand what it is, and to understand how the common-sense of the research participants is different. (Packer 1995)

The interpretive process brings up different issues, and data from different settings needs to be grouped together to establish the major themes to move the research forward. These may be conforming with or diverging from the research questions, 'therefore from a rather *local(ized)* experience we may draw implications that concern' (Vasconcelos 2005: 143). Aspects of the research design I will be employing is in case studies as a method of data collection and this is defined by (Bogdan and Biklen 1982 cited in Wilkinson 2003: 280) as a 'detailed examination of one setting, or one single subject, ... or one particular event' which strives to show 'the complex and fluid interaction of events, relationships, and other factors in a unique and real instance'. This can be seen as one of the means to the interpretation of what is happening in a naturalistic setting, albeit influenced by the presence of the researcher. 'Even when we choose to study more than one case simultaneously, each is still an in-depth study of a single case'. Thus, a case study is an approach which through 'study of uniqueness of the particular we come to understand the universal' (Simons 1996 cited in Wilkinson 2003: 280). Interpreting the data, through an interpretive perspective, adds the building blocks which become the wall of knowledge, and this is a claim I agree with.

Graue and Walsh (1998) argue that children *must* be studied in context, not just wider social and cultural contexts, but in their 'local contexts' of school and home. For although Graue and Walsh define 'context' as '*a culturally and historically situated place and time, a specific here and now*'. ... they suggest that children exist within multiple and 'nested' contexts which mutually constitute each other – contexts which shape and in turn are shaped by individuals, resources, intentions and ideas.

(Wilkinson 2003: 279)

This sentiment directs my thinking towards the context of my research in the examination of the development of cultural identity in children in early childhood settings.

My position as researcher

Blaxter et al (1996: 5) gives a list of *Twenty things you didn't know about research* which include: research is subjective, research can be done in many ways, research can be done by the people and for the people, research can turn theory into action, and there are no definitive answers (or are there?).

Rolfe (2001: 230) states 'all humans are observers; they have to be'. As a professional practitioner and researcher I assert I have the competences to establish and conduct research within the work situation, a naturalistic early years setting, to identify those actions and reactions, to look for the patterns emerging from the data, which will generate reliable and valid data.

The researcher is expected to retain a detached, impartial position in relation to the thing being studied and not let personal feelings or social values influence the questions pursued, the results reported or the analysis of the findings. (Denscombe 2002:16)

I am aware that for example during participant observations within selected settings, as proposed in the research programme, I will not be able to see one hundred percent of what is happening so consistent and practical solutions need to be established. These should be structures I can employ which enable me to stand back from the situation and analyse through an interpretive perspective. I believe that as an experienced practitioner/ researcher I have the capacity to sink into the background in a setting and observe the interactions between practitioners, parents, and children. I believe I can defend this position without it having had a measurable influence on the social context. Rolfe (2001: 229) describes time-sampling methods of collecting data with observations of individual children taken for 15 seconds over four 3 minute periods, and every 4

minutes for 20 seconds in a naturalistic setting. My intention is to observe for short periods on a number of occasions and record on tick sheets what I see. I want to know how people feel and what they do, not what I want them to do. To this end I need to devise research instruments which would be appropriate, with a defined set of indicators applied to all the settings.

While in medicine, ethics committees may offer some (albeit imperfect) protection, no such formal ethical procedures exist for children ... asked to take part in ... social research. (Roberts 2000: 229)

The Interpretive approach emphasises the meaning the actions have for the participants. I propose to research these meanings, in relation to cultural identity, to children, practitioners, and parents within the context of early years' settings. This places me in a position of identifying the issues under discussion; what am I to be specifically researching – the focus of the research, how to frame that research; the questions I should ask, what will be the consequences of the research, will expectations for change be raised, my intuitive position on the nature of the research, will this be right in this context, is it personally appropriate to me, will I feel comfortable doing the research? These challenges enable me to sensitively decide how to conduct the research, which can only be through a theoretical interpretive perspective.

As previously stated I have wide experience of working with children, practitioners and parents, particularly minority ethnic groups, and have experienced lifestyles and early years' settings in many other countries. This adds to my world view and where I feel comfortable. I relate to others from a position of interest in diversity, in the worth of the individual, with respect for their views and differences. I do not agree with everything I see, but am anxious to understand and learn from others. As a white person I have not experienced racism, but as a female from a working class background I have experienced the

disadvantages and stereotyping this brings. My Christianity informs my outlook and perspective, although I am questioning of its manifestations within the various denominations. I am a non-conformist with a liberal perspective and feel no threat from other religions. The more I learn and understand the more liberal I become. I bring all these approaches to the research.

Field research, ethics and young children

Children are not miniature adults and cannot be treated as such. Morrow in Milner (1999: 205) adds that consideration should also be taken of different perceptions at different ages, that 'children are potentially vulnerable to exploitation in interactions with adults, and thus day-to-day adult responsibilities to children must be fulfilled'. Because children normally have a gatekeeper, who allows or disallows access, this has implications for consent. The advantages of researching with children and taking their views and wishes into account, is that it leads, according to Morrow, to better understanding, information, and services for children. Due to the sensitive nature of researching with young children referred to by Morrow, ethical implications need to be addressed at the initial stage of research design, and monitored throughout the process.

Children are not adults. Researchers need, therefore, not to adopt different methods *per se*, but to adopt practices which resonate with children's own concerns and routines. (Christensen and James 2000: 7)

Emphasis is on the rights of the child and the highest ethical practice will be followed throughout. Pettitt and Kirby (1999:83) identify obstacles which could affect ethical research with children unless adequate preparations are made. These include the power relationship between children and researcher, the need for appropriate means of communication, age-specific methodologies, children not being perceived as competent to give reliable information, and the greater impact the research may have on children. I would also add cultural perception to this list. We cannot divorce ourselves from our view of the world which is integral to ourselves. Aubrey et al (2000:116) refers to the context that:

Cultural values are not always consciously held. Individuals are rarely aware of their permeating existence and insidious influence. Cultural values are part of intuitive knowledge and people are not always conscious of their own cultural biases. The unconscious nature of cultural experiences and their inherent values makes it very difficult for a person to 'leave them behind'

As a practitioner of many years standing, and having knowledge and experience of children and families from many different countries and cultures, I am however aware that I look through the prism of a white, English, Christian, female, liberal, practitioner perspective. I am aware looking at early years' provision through a cultural lens, but because of my wide experience I feel I am able to interpret what I am seeing through a multi-cultural lens rather than the narrow perspective of my personal cultural background. I feel I can be objective within this context because of my wide work experience of assessing practitioners and provision, as an experienced researcher, and the cultural exposure I have experienced around the world.

There is no definitive code pertaining specifically to research with children and this provided a challenge in the early stages of the research. Within the various codes referred to; British Educational Research Association (BERA 1992), the British Psychological Association (BPA 1996), and the British Sociological Association (BSA 1993) there are few references to ethics and young children. BERA revised their ethical guidance for educational research in 2004 to include specific guidelines on researching with children, prior to that there was only a single reference to children in BERA Guidelines (1992: 2) stating:

8. Care should be taken when interviewing children and students up to school leaving age: permission should be obtained from the school, and if they so suggest, the parents.

This implies that research with children can be undertaken without the consent of the child, or a parent if a school does not request it.

The most recent guidelines from the BSA guidelines make the following statement

30) Research involving children requires particular care. The consent of the child should be sought in addition to that of the parent. Researchers should use their skills to provide information that could be understood by the child, and their judgement to decide on the child's capacity to understand what is proposed. Specialist advice and expertise should be sought where relevant. Researchers should have regard for issues of child protection and make provision for the potential disclosure of abuse.

So ethical guidance relating to children is gaining prominence, which can only be of benefit to the youngest members of society.

Since the introduction of the Children Act 1989, the Education Act 1993, the DfEE Code of Practice (1994a) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, ratified in the UK in 1995) there has been greater awareness of the rights of the child, and the ethical research imperative to listen to children. Publications also take time to catch up, for example a book published by the National Children's Bureau/ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Clark and Moss 2001) with its emphasis on listening to children, makes no reference to ethics.

Research, particularly with children, is not something to be taken lightly. It must be principled and worthwhile. Alston and Bowles (2003: 2) identify 5 ethical criteria for research applicable to all research with people.

<p>Five ethical criteria for research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Autonomy/ self-determination (includes Informed consent and confidentiality)• Non-maleficence (not doing harm)• Beneficence (doing good)• Justice (are the purposes just?)• Positive contribution to knowledge <p>Adapted from Beachamp (1982)</p>

Table 1: Five ethical criteria for research

Children are now recognised as active participants in research about them, rather than subjects or objects to be studied, as might have occurred in the past. Woodhead and Faulkner (2000: 31) make reference to the notion that

... methodological and attitudinal innovations are closely linked to social changes in the status of children ... some developmental psychologists have risen to ... (the) challenge to the psychological community to 'listen to the child' and how the notion of the child as subject (or object) is gradually being replaced by the notion of child as participant

In the literature there is evidence that children are increasingly being listened to (Kirby 1999, Milner and Carolin 1999, Clark and Moss 2001). In the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989 – ratified in the UK in 1995), articles 12 and 13, place emphasis on the importance of informing children of actions relating to themselves, and taking account of their views,

Article 12 ... the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child

Article 13: A child's right to obtain and make known information and express his or her views

Interpretations of these statements will be debated by different researchers, and as awareness grows, ever more innovative methods of data collection in field research will be made.

It is important to understand listening to be a process which is not limited to the spoken word. The phrase '*voice of the child*' may suggest the transmission of ideas only through words, but listening to young children, including pre-verbal children, needs to be a process which is open to many different ways young children use to express their views and experiences. (Clark and Moss 2001:1)

Seeking to take into account all available good practice this research involves explaining procedures to children and all of the significant actors, gaining informed consent from the adults and children, and taking account of their views.

As referred to above it has in the past been common practice, when researching in a school or preschool provision, for consent to be given by the head-teacher or manager, rather than the parent or child. As the person in charge of the setting is considered to be *in loco parentis*, decisions may be made by them providing children are not identified. This is less common today, and parents are more generally consulted. In this research consent will be gained from managers, practitioners, parents and the children directly involved.

In research with children, it is necessary also to be aware of interacting and competing principles. For example, the difficulties in ensuring valid informed consent by a child may be offset by seeking it from the parent.

(Lindsay 2000:18)

In this research all participants, adults and children, were given information on the research, methodology, and dissemination of outcomes at a level and in a form they were able to understand and question. Even very young children can be told the process of the research; that they will be watched, what they do will be written down, and parents and other adults will be able to see it. If they agree to these conditions this, with the written consent of the parent/ guardian, can be acknowledged as informed consent. Due to the ages of the children directly involved with this research, that is 2 – 4 year olds, information given to them must inevitably be simple and clear. Very young children may not have the maturity to be able to give 'consent' to the research, it may be that they 'assent' and this should be taken as seriously. Lofdahl (2006: 77-88) pursues this perspective by describing research she had undertaken and the difficulties of describing the consent, and its consequences, when researching young children.

Ethical issues were undertaken according to ethical principles (information, consent, confidentiality and conduct) within Humanities and Social Sciences (Ventenskapspadet/The Swedish Research Council, 2002). Teachers, parents and children were informed about the aim of my study and their rights to withdraw. With a few exceptions, the parents agreed to let their children participate. I also asked the children for permission to enter their play worlds and record their play. The concepts 'assent' or 'accept' may be a better alternative than consent when small children are participants. This means with very young children if the request is explained and they do not protest, their behaviour may be interpreted as accepting. However, even the term 'accept' is uncertain in relation to children's ability to understand the conditions for participating

(Backe-Hansen, 2002; Christensen Havdrup, 2000). I also want to pay attention to the fact that 'informed consent' may well be 'educated consent' ... as in an ... educational setting ... the children are used to following what adults tell them what to do.

Ethical principles that were followed in this research included recognition of the significance of the competence of the researcher. Lindsay (2000:19, 20) reinforces this statement:

Research with children poses the same ethical questions that apply to other types of research. Practitioners should respect their participants, in their interactions, in the tasks they set, and in their treatment of information which they acquire. Researchers should be competent, ... Their concerns address primarily the participants in their research, but also the wider scientific and professional community, and society as a whole.

... concerns specific to children ... are focused upon informed, valid consent, and ways of ensuring that this is attained, but the child is also included meaningfully in the decision making process.

There is a prerequisite of respect for the participants, a responsible attitude being taken, and integrity of approach. According to Alston and Bowles (1998: 23) research should not do harm, be of use, be just and valid, the individual child or adult should be able to choose to participate or not, and should make a positive contribution to knowledge. Participants need to be reassured that information given will be used anonymously, that individual children and adults will not be identified, and that the results will only be used for the purpose of the research and its dissemination. It should be recognised that while research is never value-free it should strive to make explicit the perspective of the researchers, as this will affect the result.

Working across cultures can present both workers and clients with challenges to their own identity, values or world views. Working with children can sometimes put us in touch with times in our own lives when we might have been vulnerable to the will and power of others.

Black and white workers alike might become engaged in the unlearning of certain things about themselves accrued from childhood as a result of the distortion of the worth ascribed to black and white people. This can sometimes be the unlearning of negative attributes, personally or racially based ... that might have served as an obstacle to positive and realistic

development. ... (they) might have to work through gender or social class issues or deal with a false sense of confidence

(Thomas 1999: 75)

Ethical practices must include honesty, that data is genuine and not misrepresented, that it has been collected by the researcher, that errors and omissions are noted, and as part of the analysis perceived bias is noted. If an ethical issue were to arise during the research process this is to be raised with both supervisors and included in the thesis indicating how it was dealt with. It is hoped this approach will inform future researchers working with children. All data is held in a secure setting and anonymised where appropriate.

The views of parents and practitioners, observed practice, and experience gained by the researcher during the course of the research, will add to the body of knowledge and understanding on the particular ethical aspects of working with very young children. It is recognised that the researcher, in acknowledging her own cultural perspective, will build safeguards into the research process to give greater objectivity to the findings. Connolly et al (2006:22) refers to our ability and tendency to categorise people on the basis of 'appearance or role as belonging to a particular group' They go on to say that this is naturally occurring behaviour and we would find it difficult to survive without it. The statements addressed by Connolly stress the importance of being aware of your own cultural perspective and that to be effective one has to develop awareness by engagement with various cultural communities over a 'sustained period of time'.

Fundamental to culturally responsive practice ... is the understanding the practitioner has of their own cultural identity and attitude. This entails developing an awareness of those aspects of their individual cultural identity that are both conscious and below the level of conscious thought.

(Connolly 2006:26)

Field research in early childhood settings

The design of the research draws on my personal experience of working in the field and reflects the professional ethos which informs my practice. My own research practice and previous experience acquired through working with colleagues, parents, and children recognises that methodological approaches should be practical for settings and practitioners to accommodate. They need to include taking into account the demands already being made on practitioners from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), and other agencies. Methods must not take too much practitioner time away from the children, be sensitive to the situation, and involve reflection of the circumstances and outcomes. The approach also needs to be child friendly. This requires a highly skilled, informed, and expert researcher with a sensitive and creative approach to the research design, and acknowledges the privileged position the researcher holds.

Not only do practitioners have difficulty finding time to participate in research, they also often do not access research undertaken by others.

(An) ... evaluative report (Hillage et al 1998) criticised the failure in uptake of the findings of educational research in the UK. Not only the researchers themselves were censured for failing to disseminate findings effectively, ... policy makers ... and practitioners too were criticised. The latter were, according to this research team, simply not accessing knowledge, although they were forgiven because their lack of time to scour research journals, to reflect and discuss ..., was given as an excuse. (Aubrey et al 2000: 4)

Research Design

In designing the research methodology, consideration was taken of the logistics and the requirements of the settings, and the time commitment required of participants. This needed to be offset against the research requirement for reliability and validity. Childcare and early years, practitioners are rarely able to stand back and observe specifically for research purposes, or complete complex records. Demands on practitioners' time are continuous and substantial, and the children must have priority. Whilst there is recognition on the part of early years' practitioners of the importance to undertake systematic research to advance practice, in reality this is limited by time and other resource constraints.

Whilst demanding rigour, the research design acknowledged the need for me to conduct the fieldwork within the normal routine of the setting with minimum disruption or distraction.

In current research programmes there is an increasing commitment to include children in the design, where appropriate, and participation in the field research. Research can involve children at different levels. Jambunathan and Counselman (2004) measured children's perception of self-competence with Asian Indian pre-school children living in the USA and Asian Indian children living in India. Each child attended an early years' setting and was asked to select pictures, which they pointed to, depicting their own identification showing high or low competence tasks. A more child-active piece of research by Kenner (2000) demonstrated how much richer the data was when the children were given a naturalistic setting and freedom to develop the activity. Nursery children were given a range of literacy items – in the home corner, trays of writing materials, a writing area, wall space for displays, material in different languages brought from home, with parental involvement. Their response was to include literacy skills in a wide variety of play – making menus, telephone messages, tickets, drawings, squiggles and symbols with children progressing rapidly and confidently. The contrast that can be drawn from these two pieces of research is the richness of the data obtained when the children are more actively involved in the process.

One aspect of particular relevance to this research into the development of cultural identity in young children is that it is as naturalistic as possible; all children studied are at a regular session in the setting, they will be in their familiar surroundings, participating in the normal routine, with well-known practitioners. Naturalistic observations (Dunn 2005: 91) are the way forward:

A ... domain of children's development that has been illuminated by naturalistic observations concerns their understanding of others' emotions, intentions, and their appreciation of the connections between others' thoughts, beliefs and goals, and their actions. The nature of children's understanding of why people behave the way they do, and of what they think and feel – their 'discovery of the mind' ... naturalistic observations have played a central part in raising questions about the nature of the early stages of understanding others.

The only changes required for this research are that a researcher will be in the room, positioned as unobtrusively as possible and blending into the background, making notes on a clipboard, and specific resources will be introduced by their regular practitioner. The research covers four perspectives: the cultural environment of the setting, the practitioners, the parents, and the children. The research questions will determine the data collected.

While there is a need to produce the best research possible Denscombe (2002:3) states:

There is no such thing as perfect research and 'you cannot please all the people all the time' when it comes to doing social research. However, an awareness of the ground rules can help the project researcher to do a competent job that can be defended and justified to those who judge the quality of the end product.

In trying to address the issues it was acknowledged that whilst not perfect, this research into the development of cultural identity in young children was based on a sound framework within the parameters of academic research, while taking in the constraints of the research subject, and the limitations of working with very young children.

The choice of method or combination of methods should be made in the light of the need to establish rigor and credibility of the research project. Choice of method is but one consideration among a variety of methodological considerations that cannot be neglected. Thus, the researcher must pay attention to issues to do with sampling, design, replicability of procedures, reliability of interpretation, range of applicability of the findings, and so forth. (Greene and Hill 2005: 13)

From an interpretive perspective when making observations in early years settings, knowledge is gained through actions and behaviour, the way resources are used, communication, and cultural inferences that are made. That is that values are placed on these actions which are interpreted in a cultural context. The role of participant researcher develops from a particular perspective according to position, knowledge, and experience along a continuum from complete outsider to complete insider (Jorgensen 1989: 55). It is not possible to be completely detached from the situation being observed, as it is inevitable that some involvement will occur: this is particularly pertinent in an early years setting.

My background, life experience, and skills as a practitioner, leads me to the way I view the world, through an interpretive lens. This is why I feel I can engage in the research with a high degree of validity and reliability. As a professional in an early years' world I feel I have developed these skills to a very high level. I have competence within the social context and am able to stand back and validly observe the situation and interpret what I see. However as a professional researcher I need to see that social situation from a different position – sometimes looking at the play of the children, at other times through conversations, or interviews with practitioners. Recording a series of observations, of both children and adults, gives greater validity to the research findings.

Observational methods can take a variety of forms. In terms of content, they can be naturalistic or contrived. The possibilities in terms of recording are even more various, involving paper and pencil, audio, video and filmed records. The data may include children's actions and verbalizations. Sampling methods also dictate what is recorded. For example, time sampling methods result in frequency counts, whereas event sampling typically produces descriptive narratives.

(Greene and Hill 2005:13)

Researchers have a choice of methods, each valid, each investigating aspects of the subject. Some are better suited to certain subjects, others different aspects. As expressed by Denscombe (2002: 17)

Science and religion have different areas of discourse. Each adopts a different approach to the discovery of knowledge and focuses on different topics for investigation. Science deals with the material world; religion deals with moral and spiritual matters.

Denscombe also states that of the divisions between the different forms of data collection that 'no single approach is universally accepted' (ibid: 2). In relation to research design, debate on the appropriateness of methodology for the particular research being undertaken, Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998:21) assert that for much research a pragmatic approach which considers 'the research question to be more important than either the method they use or the worldview that is supposed to underlie the method' is the way forward. A methodology has been designed for this research which is sensitive to the needs of under five-year-old children, those who work with them, and the researcher. The data collection is qualitative with a quantitative dimension using a variety of research tools. The cultural perspectives of the participants in the research, parents, practitioners, and researcher, and their values, play a significant role in the interpretation of results. A multi-method approach is employed in the research. The mixed methodology design used incorporated qualitative and quantitative data collection as a pragmatic interpretive approach to the subject

there is a need to recognise that policy and practice questions may be addressed in a number of different ways. ... the emphasis should be upon methodological pluralism rather than debates between different research paradigms. Childhood research needs to remain open to the fullest range of techniques available to researchers if it is to be able to address the range of future policy questions.

(McKechnie and Hobbs 2004: 270)

Identification of population

Rationale was based on personal experience of the researcher of working in England, in particular Leicester and Leicestershire, the rich variety of early years provision there, the knowledge of quality practice being offered in the area, the population mix, and ease of access. The cultural and ethnic mix of children, parents, and practitioners in the geographical area selected were of particular interest.

- Population figures are: 280,000 in Leicester City (Census 2001), and 610,000 in the county of Leicestershire (Census 2001).
- Nationally 2% of the population of England and Wales are identified as Indian (self definition), with Leicester having the highest proportion at 25.7% (Census 2001)
- The national average of child-carers, defined by their minority ethnic status (total BME numbers as defined by the Census 2001) is 8%. (Work Survey 2004)

The City of Leicester has an ethnically mixed population. Of the 280,000 inhabitants 36% (2001 Census) are from minority ethnic groups, the largest being Asian, Gujarati speaking Hindus. Though less than 3% are from African Caribbean communities they make a significant contribution to the life of the city. There are two small Jewish communities, from Orthodox Judaism and the Progressive Liberal perspectives. There are other significant established religious and cultural groups in Leicester and Leicestershire including Sikhs, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, Polish Catholics, Irish, Vietnamese, Travellers, and more recently Kosovan, Somali, Zimbabwean, and other small groups of asylum seekers and refugees.

Of a population of 610,000 Leicestershire has cultural mix which is very different to the City giving an interesting juxtaposition of results. Figures in the 2001 Census show the county of Leicestershire having 95% of a white ethnic majority, with 5% from minority ethnic communities. The largest minority ethnic group are Asians, concentrated in particular locations in suburbs beyond Leicester City boundary and in Loughborough.

Sample of specific locations for research purposes

To ensure the sample was representative, a map of Leicestershire and the city of Leicester was used. Six Borough Council areas were selected with a range of urban and rural settings and county towns, while in the city nine diverse wards were chosen. The criterion was to ensure a sample which reflected the diverse population mix from the high-density multi-cultural perspective of the inner city, through to the mostly white suburbs, and into small industrial towns, predominantly white market towns, and rural locations. A selection of twenty-five settings was made, some on the basis of recommendations from early years colleagues where it was felt the setting would be responsive, would be interested in the results, provided good or satisfactory practice, and were not in crisis themselves. Other settings were randomly selected from promotional material in newspapers, listing publications, and on the Internet. Due to higher proportions of the minority ethnic communities in the city, the sample selected reflected the diversity of the population with two thirds of the settings in the city, and one third in the county.

This enabled a range of different types of provision to be targeted to include both full-day and sessional, care and education, and included playgroup, private day nursery, crèche, Montessori, special needs nursery, parent/carers and toddler group, independent school nursery, Kindergarten, Social Services, and Local Authority nursery, and operating from community and neighbourhood centres, Community College, Further Education College, women's centre, and voluntary organisation.

The research questions and design

A multi-method approach, with a range of qualitative and quantitative data, was considered the most appropriate way to address this complex subject of cultural identity. The literature review informed the research questions which, in turn, informed the research design. The aim was to utilise a range of methodologies in order to elicit as much information as possible within the constraints of the human resources available. The research had to be conducted within the limitations of a single researcher and restrictions of the practitioners.

Research Question	Purpose	Method of data collection
1. What do practitioners and parents identify as specific factors in the cultural environment of the early years setting which support the development of cultural identity of young children?	This is about parents and practitioners understanding about culture/ cultural identity. How they identify this within the setting.	Setting questionnaire Parental questionnaire Cultural audit of setting Practitioner diary
2. How do the values and ethos of practitioners in early years' settings impact in the formation of the cultural identity of young children?	This is about practitioners understanding of cultural identity acquisition which supports quality practice	Setting questionnaire Practitioner observations Practitioner's 'cultural journey'
3. What aspects of the cultural environment in early years setting are conducive to the positive development of cultural identity in young children?	This is about professional practice in operation	Practitioner/ child observations Introduced resources Meeting parents Group practitioner meeting

Table 2: Research questions and data collection proposals

A questionnaire for settings and a questionnaire for parents constituted the first phase after the pilot, in order to gather a snapshot of the current situation in Leicester and Leicestershire with the intention of data gathering largely for research question 1 – 'What do practitioners and parents identify as specific factors in the cultural environment of the early years setting which support the development of cultural identity of young children?'. A large scale quantitative research programme was not practical within the constraints imposed, but was seen as an effective way of gathering data from a wide range of settings.

Within an interpretive paradigm I felt it essential to communicate directly with the participants in the settings, which would inevitably be of a smaller number than could be addressed by the questionnaires. Direct observations of children and practitioners, and unstructured interviews of named-practitioners depicting their 'cultural journey' was proposed, in addition to relevant questions on the questionnaires, to address research question 2 – 'How do the values and ethos of practitioners in early years' settings impact in the formation of the cultural identity of young children?' The third research question – 'What aspects of the cultural environment in early years setting are conducive to the positive development of cultural identity in young children? – required more observations, researcher introduced-resources, talking to parents and practitioners.

Effective targeting was considered to be the direct contact with managers of early years settings rather than a scattergun approach aimed at all provision in the defined geographical area. A ten-point staged proposal for data collection was made (see table 3).

Pilot proposals for testing and developing the research instruments.

A pilot was tested by individuals and in settings who would not be participating in the research, as most of them were out of the target area in another county. Setting questionnaires were evaluated by a Local Authority workplace nursery and a primary school teacher, parental questionnaires by two mothers and one father all with pre-school children. The activity/ resources matrix (see appendix 1) used for data collection proved very satisfactory.

A Local Education Authority nursery was visited, observations carried out, and play resources assessed and recorded. As all children in this research were under the age of five it was necessary to devise sensitive, appropriate, and ethical means of eliciting their views. According to Burgess (Lewis and Lindsey 2000: XIV) 'No longer can researchers assume that those social science methods that are used to study adults can be used in the same way to study children.' With this in mind I purchased sets of cut-out people as a resource,

showing adults and children, male and female, of various ages, mobility, and skin tones, and wearing a variety of costumes. I played with individual children aged 2, 3, 4 and 7, with their parents present but not participating. I then played with the material with two groups of three and four year olds in a nursery setting without the parents.

Initially I used play resources directly with the children in the setting but this proved inefficient. I recognised that it was unrealistic to expect a relaxed response from children unused to a stranger in their setting. I felt that it would be more appropriate to devise an alternative approach and ask practitioners familiar to the children to present the materials and develop a discussion. I then observed and recorded interaction between children and the practitioner, and children with the resources. Additional information was obtained from the practitioner, i.e. children's comments or reactions that might have been missed me, and separately recorded as part of the data.

Suggestions for improvement were made by all the pilot participants and revised versions drawn up which, when tested, proved more satisfactory. The research proposals were reviewed in the light of the pilot.

Many modern researchers use a mixed methodology of quantitative and qualitative data, as I have done. One reason for this is to get different amounts of data (i.e. questionnaires can be completed by a greater number of subjects), different perspectives (i.e. self-administered or participant observation), and in order to provide triangulation for rigour of results.

The setting-questionnaire was intended to establish the types of activities in the setting which might have an impact on the development of cultural identity in young children, the ethnic makeup of practitioners and children, examples of practice, specific training undertaken or desired by practitioners related to culture, views on promoting knowledge on a wide range of cultures, and how parents are involved in this process in the setting. Considerable thought was

given as how to ask about the range of activities and resources that were in the setting without there being leading questions, or the unsatisfactory nature of having inadequate responses because the respondents were unsure of my expectations of the researcher. A matrix was devised where a range of resources and activities were included, one to a box, with some blank spaces for the setting to fill in additional items. Respondents were asked to tick all the boxes relevant to their setting. The intention of this was to give every respondent the opportunity of having the satisfaction of ticking boxes, while for me it was immediately obvious from a glance the richness of the environment. In addition, in pursuing the interpretive approach open ended questions enabled the setting to record their views, philosophy, ethos, values, concerns, limitations, and training needs. Some settings also provided policy/ information documents which added to the overall data.

Parental questionnaires sought to establish parents' involvement in the setting, whether they felt they influenced the practices of the setting by being there, how, in their view, practitioners help to support their children in order to develop their cultural identity, about their views on promoting different cultures, and how practitioners may benefit by further training on cultural issues.

Both parents and settings were asked to provide information on ethnic background of parent/ or practitioners and children.

More detailed information was planned to be collected from a selected number of settings through participant observation. Seven settings were chosen for this purpose from the twenty-five who submitted the questionnaires. They were chosen to give a range of settings from the city and county, full-day and sessional were represented, and a representative mix of minority ethnic practitioners and children, including children of refugees or asylum seekers, all white practitioners and children. The multi-cultural activities and resources matrix on the questionnaire, and responses to open questions, contributed to the selection as it enabled the researcher to experience settings identifying levels of

cultural awareness and interest. The most effective method for this additional data collection was considered to be examination of the setting, time sampling, event sampling, and resource use sampling; both adults and children being directly observed. Planned two hour cycles of evidence gathering and note taking were drawn up.

Play resources were selected from commercial outlets to offer a range of activities to present to the children to assess their use, language use, interest, innovation, and adult intervention when offered as a normal part of the regular routine in the setting. A range of play resources appropriate to the research were purchased with the intention that different combinations could be tried in different settings. These ranged from family photographs, people jigsaws, cut-out cardboard family figures, to a range of display people cut-outs. (see appendix 5) A search was made for simple picture cards or games, showing individual children looking like individual children in the setting and their peers. Photographs showing pictures of children with different expressions were available, but not in facial repose. I bought a border strip, designed for edging a display board, which was printed with a row of head and shoulder views of young children, boys and girls, and of varying ethnicity. I cut and mounted them in random photos on A5 card and laminated them. A set of four provided a simple 'face lotto' game for up to four players. No guidance was to be given as to their use, each setting to use them in the way they felt most appropriate.

Managers were approached directly by telephone to ascertain their support for the research programme and the level of willingness to involve themselves at different levels. Due to my standing as a practitioner and writer in the early years field I was either known, or known of, in many settings in Leicester and Leicestershire which made my contacts more receptive to my requests.

I obtained informed consent from the parents (written) and children (verbal), and requested non-participating practitioners in the setting should be informed of the research process and my attendance, prior to the field research taking place.

The lead was taken from the managers of the settings as to how this should be addressed. They were requested to make practitioners aware of my proposal and a standard information/ consent slip was prepared for parents. . Parents and practitioners were informed that a police check had been carried out on the researcher. The consent form gave parents the right to opt out if they did not agree to their child being involved. Early on in the process managers were assured that anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained and the research would only go forward as long as they were in agreement with the processes. No photographs were taken. No setting or practitioner declined to be involved or withdrew from the research.

To maintain anonymity of the child and to aid me as the researcher, each child selected for direct observation was introduced to me by the familiar practitioner (from hereon referred to as the named-practitioner). I explained to him or her that I had come to watch them playing, that I was going to write down what they were doing on my clipboard pad which I showed them, and I was going to show what I had written to the practitioners. I asked if I could watch them playing. Consent was given in all but one case (where the child indicated she did not want to participate so she was thanked and the named-practitioner selected another child). A sticker was awarded to each participating child. This served as identification in lieu of a personal name on the recording sheets, aided the researcher in tracking unfamiliar individual children as they mixed with the rest of the group and moved around the setting, and as a reward for participating. The participating named-practitioner was also identified in the same way. There were thirty-four participants altogether requiring thirty-four different stickers!

Named-practitioners, the managers, and any parents present were given the opportunity at the end of the data collection in the setting on that day to read what had been written.

Developing a programme of actions

A plan of action was drawn up indicating that a minimum of three visits should be made to the seven target settings identified over a two or three week period (see table 2 below). The plan clearly showed who would be involved when, the time commitment, what needed to be done, and which elements were collectively being offered as a mini training package. Following an explanatory telephone call the initial visit was to meet the Manager to explain the expectations and requirements of the research, to discuss the appropriate practitioner to guide, support, and participate in the research, and to discuss with, and ensure consent was gained from, the parents. Practitioners not directly involved were also to be informed. This was followed by an assessment of the physical environment, an audit, to record posters and wall decorations, readily visible toys and equipment, and general welcome of the building. The participating practitioner was given a pack of information with examples of records to be taken and optional relevant reading material.

- For the settings and practitioners, stage two (following stage one piloting the questionnaires) was to complete a practitioner questionnaire for their setting, and give out parental questionnaires to their parents.
- Stage 3 was piloting introduced multi-cultural resources.
- Stage four onwards was for seven settings to be more actively involved with me as the researcher (see table 3).

Multi-method ten-point research process

Stage of research	Research instrument	Number involved	The research process
1	Pilot parent questionnaire	3 parents	Test research instrument - review and amend – go to stage 2
1	Pilot setting questionnaire	2 settings	Test research instrument - review and amend – go to stage 2
2	Parental Questionnaire	75	Views on cultural identity in setting/ Training for practitioners

		parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - extract points for discussing with parents in settings - go to stage 7
Stage of research	Research instrument	Number involved	The research process
2	Setting Questionnaire	25 settings	<p>Assessment of the multi-cultural environment to include matrix for activities and resources used in their setting/ Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - select 7 settings for in-depth research - go to stage 4
3	Resources introduced to setting	1 setting	<p>Pilot to test research instruments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - review and amend methodology - go to stage 6
4	Cultural audit of the setting	7 settings	<p>Establish richness of multi-cultural environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - go to stage 5
5	Observations of practitioners	7 named practitioners	<p>Recording actions/ communication with children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - go to stage 6
5	Observations of children	27 children	Recording activities undertaken/ communication with adults
6	Introduced resources	7 settings	<p>Researcher provides multi-cultural resources and observes use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - go to stage 8
7	Meeting parents	8 Parents/ carers	Ad hoc 1-1 meetings in 5 settings as parent/ carers delivered/ collected children
8	Recording of 'cultural journey'	7 named practitioners	<p>Unstructured interview of named-practitioners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - go to stage 9
9	Diary sheet	7 practitioners	<p>Practitioners tick a simple diary sheet for two weeks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - go to stage 10
10	Group meeting	7 named practitioners	Sharing of experiences

Table 3: Multi-method ten-point research process

The most appropriate practitioner was requested to work with the researcher in order to maintain continuity, be identified with the research, to be the contact point, and the one able to make the timing arrangements with the researcher. In return the researcher presented the programme as a mini-training package, to include relevant published material written by the researcher, and which culminated in a certificate of involvement from the University. This could be recorded as Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for the practitioner. At the end of the data gathering, by way of thanks, each named-practitioner was also to be given a face matching game set for their own use. It was considered by me to be very important to have a reciprocal arrangement whereby in return for the time and support given by the practitioner to me, that I should give recognition for the contribution made by the practitioner.

The direct practice based research

- Direct observations of seven settings including the cultural environment, ethos, play, interaction amongst practitioners, interaction between practitioners and children, interaction amongst children, and interaction between practitioners and parents. It is a non-experimental observational approach, relatively unobtrusive in a naturalistic setting.
- In each of the seven settings the named-practitioner was directly observed.
- Assessment of the multicultural environment included what activities and resources practitioners in twenty-five settings recorded on the questionnaire as used in their particular provision. A physical audit of the setting to gain an impact of the welcome, the inclusiveness of the setting, and the range of resources available was made.
- Multi-cultural play resources, depicting people, were introduced into the setting and their use observed.
- Parents gave additional information when questioned at the five of the settings.

- Practitioners were asked to tape-record, in the presence of the researcher, an unstructured interview describing their own personal 'cultural journey' through life. Prompts were only given if needed.
- The named-practitioner in six of the selected settings completed a diary sheet for up to ten half-day sessions following the final visit of the researcher.
- I kept a research diary to record contacts, experiences outside the devised research instruments, and to organise material for visits to settings etc. (Dyson 1995 11-13)
- Research data will contribute to case studies of the seven settings.

Participants	Number involved
Manager/ practitioners in varied settings	25
Parents with children at those settings	75
Setting selected from twenty-five for in depth examination	7
Named-practitioners from the seven settings	7
Children in the seven settings	Minimum 3 in each setting

Table 4: Planned participants in research

The range of data to be collected, the multi-cultural resources chosen, and the research instruments were designed and prepared. Final details of record sheets were not made until the setting questionnaires in stage one had been returned. The matrix box on this, identifying the range of activities and resources held in the settings, proved a successful method of collecting this data. Many of these same headings were used for the setting data research record sheets planned for direct observations, to aid consistency and approach. For time sampling, some event sampling, and practitioner diaries the research record sheets contained columns for ticking using the headings as described above. Resources sampling, some event sampling, and cultural environment audit research records used blank narrative forms.

Data Collection	Research Instrument
Ethnic make-up of children and staff Multi-cultural resources Examples of practice Training Views on promoting a range of cultures Parental involvement	Setting Questionnaire
Ethnicity of parent and child Involvement in setting Examples of practice Views on promoting a range of cultures Training for practitioners	Parent Questionnaire
Assessment of cultural environment of setting	Audit of setting
Observation of practitioner Time-sampling	Tick sheets
Observation of practitioner Event-sampling	Tick sheets and Narrative recordings
Observation of children Time-sampling	Tick sheets
Observation of children Event-sampling	Tick sheets and Narrative recordings
Observation of practitioner and children Use of resources	Introduced multi-cultural resources Narrative recordings
Practitioner diary recordings	Tick sheets
Practitioner talking about their personal 'cultural journey' through life	Tape recording/ transcription
Meeting with all named-practitioners	Tape recording

Table 5: Research instruments proposals

Participant observations were planned for an overview of the setting to record environmental observations relating to culture, time sampling on rotation of a snapshot every five minutes for 15 minute intervals, observations every 15 seconds for five minute periods, event sampling in each setting as spontaneous play was sustained, and resource sampling to observe use of new resources brought in by me. The research design was two, one-hour time-cycles, with the first hour time sampling, and the second event sampling as incidents presented.

The target being four hours observation in each of the seven settings. Additional voluntary information from practitioners was recorded if explanations of behaviour were requested or offered. Parents and practitioners added further data by giving their comments on the cultural perspective of the setting

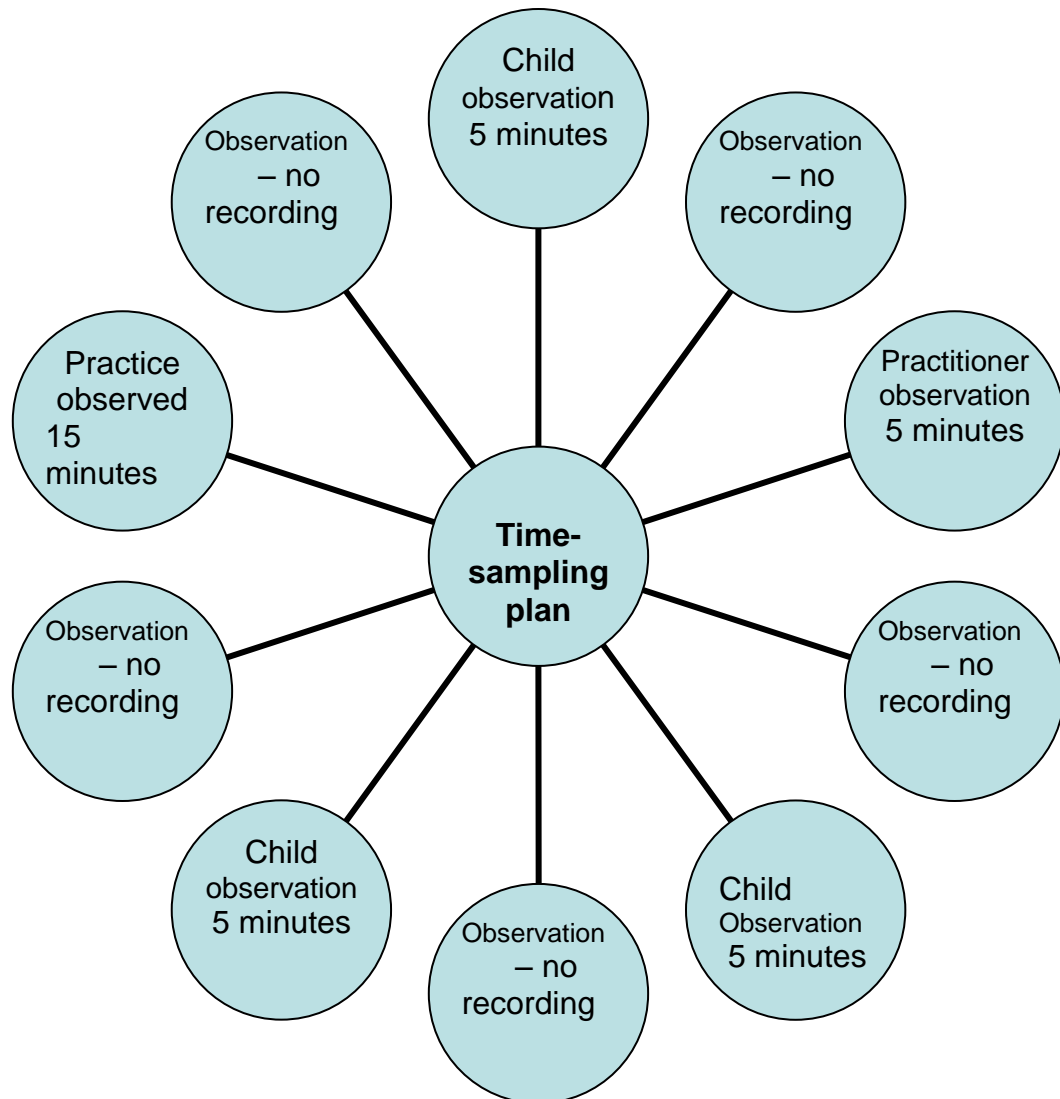


Figure 1: Time sampling plan

The Manager, who was requested to consider the criteria set by me in each of the seven settings, selected the practitioner, referred to in this research as the named-practitioner, who was chosen to work directly with the researcher in the setting. The criteria included knowing and working with the children on a regular basis, and having an interest in participating in the research. The result was most gratifying with a range of experiences and backgrounds from new entrants to the profession, to well established practitioners, individuals who had been born in the United Kingdom and overseas, participants who not only worked in the United Kingdom but some had worked overseas, ages ranged through the decades from twenties to fifties, a range of ethnic backgrounds, and both male and female.

The named-practitioners in turn selected the specific children to be observed, again fulfilling criteria requested which was that there should be different genders, where possible ethnically diverse, mixed ages, and lively children who were likely to participate in the activities.

Brief interviews with parents were obtained where practical, often at the beginning or ending of sessions. It was not possible to see parents collectively so individuals were seen as they brought or collected their children and one or more responses from a single setting were recorded on one research record sheet. Similar headings were used on the parental comment sheets.

Some time following data collection, but before the research was complete, a summary of the research and interim findings was sent to all twenty-five participatory managers. An executive summary of the final outcomes of the research is to be circulated at an appropriate time.

The validity of data is facilitated through appropriate research design, systematic data collection, and comprehensive analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) in Sarantakos (1997: 80) refer to alternative terms used for validity, for example credibility, trustworthiness, or authenticity. Examples given for testing validity

can be identified through findings supported by other studies, additional questioning, through presentation, checking for representativeness of sample, conducting research in such a way as to avoid influencing the subjects, triangulation, replication of findings, checking out alternative explanations, getting feedback from other researchers and subjects, and making comparisons with other findings. All of these factors were taken into account in the planning of the research.

It is not unusual for researchers to use a variety of techniques, including visual images, in research with children. I used jigsaw puzzles of people (complete wooden inset figures, and giant floor cut-out figures of children for the very young), photographs (of family groupings from single parent and child to extended families, showing multiple ethnicities and wearing various appropriate outfits), a game (face lotto), and people cut-outs (one set of large display figures of individuals, and one small consisting of three generations of four ethnically diverse family groups) to assess the reaction of the children and the adults to these resources. Christensen and James (2000:164) acknowledge the use of visual images as a 'recognised way in which to engage effectively with children'. While not a sufficient tool in their own right:

when combined with other methods, however, such as participant observation, they have much to offer. For example, they may permit exploration of particular issues in more depth by encouraging a concentrated focus on the topic; they can also provide a kind of methodological triangulation through allowing the researcher to assess the extent to which a group of children share a particular attitude or opinion which has been randomly gleaned by the researcher from a casual comment made in passing or overheard.

The above authors were working with ten-year-olds without the direct direction of a significant adult, whereas with under-five-year-olds it was necessary to judge some of the children's reactions through the presentation and responses of the practitioners.

Critical reflection on the research

The interpretation of data is built on forty years experience in working in the field, and having an understanding of what is being seen, hence the selection of the interpretive paradigm. Data has been collected and researched from a social reality perspective in that it is, according to Denscombe 2002:18, a

social creation, constructed in the minds of people and reinforced through their interactions with each other. It is a reality that only exists through the way people believe in it, relate to it and interpret it.

Research instrument	Description	Qualitative	Quantitative
Setting questionnaire	Full-day/ sessional Ethnicity of children and practitioners Multi-cultural resources matrix Open questions	▲	▲ ▲ ▲
Parental questionnaire	Ethnicity of parent and child Open questions	▲	▲
Setting audit	Walk through the setting recording as narrative	▲	▲
Participant observation of child	Activities and interaction Tick sheets Event sampling narrative	▲	▲
Participant observation of practitioner	Interaction with adults and children Tick sheets Event sampling narrative	▲	▲
Introduced resources	Observation of use of play resources	▲	
Parental comments	Individual meeting in setting Open questions	▲	
Practitioner	'Cultural journey'	▲	
Practitioners	Final group meeting to discuss research	▲	

Table 6: Range of qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection used

By using different methods of collecting data, on a consistent basis over a range of settings, and by involving practitioners, parents, and direct observations by the researcher, through triangulation, validation of data was possible. Triangulation

is 'generally thought to produce more valid and reliable results than the use of single methods' although not everyone agrees (Sarantakos 1997: 169).

The researcher describes this method as a 'multiple method of research: a patchwork of research instruments' each piece discrete, all interconnecting, some large, some small.

Analysing of data

The data was analysed manually with every document coded for ease of retrieval. Initially I collated information from the questionnaires; settings first, then parental. I did a mapping exercise grouping similar types of comments and ideas together. From the setting questionnaires I selected the settings for in-depth examination based on the information given which indicated their level of cultural awareness and offering me a range of locations, full-day or sessional, and catering for the needs of children with varied backgrounds and experiences. I then prepared individual folders for each of the identified settings, initially to include their setting and parental questionnaires and later adding, as it was collected audit reports, direct observation sheets, 'cultural journey' transcripts, and practitioner diaries. The field research was conducted, in each setting, according to the plan described in table 5 showing the range of qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection used. Data for each setting was scrutinized for emerging patterns, the resulting case study records are in Chapter 4. The individual folders were then dismantled and all the like with like data analysed. With the tick sheets numerical data gave an insight into the number of times, for example, communication took place between practitioner and child or practitioner with practitioner, dolls were played with, imaginative play took place, etc. The qualitative recordings added colour, examples of interaction, positive responses, comments by practitioners and parents. I began to see a patterns emerging, with demonstrations of good practice within the setting, overlaid by parental perceptions, their concerns and strengths. I found anomalies; although there was a low involvement of parents in the settings the

difference was not significant between the full-day and sessional, with parents indicating they would like to be more involved, and settings asking for support and training in working with parents. As described in Chapter 4 there was great variation in the settings visited, some having the greater advantage of permanent premises over those in shared accommodation, but that was not the significant factor which emerged from the research. Nor was it entirely due to training. Initial training of practitioners insufficiently prepared them for the cultural dimension, it has to be with experience and more specifically continuing professional development training appropriate to the setting. An exchange programme of practitioners from areas offering wide experience of cultural diversity with those of low diversity was suggested. There is a thirst for knowledge from practitioners, who demonstrated their interest, and identified what they wanted to do. Parents suggested areas where they saw gaps in knowledge and understanding of practitioners, and also offered solutions by involving them. This then becomes a two-way process of practitioners and parents receiving training, together or at separate times, for the benefit of the children.

The research was demanding, physically, intellectually, emotionally and new skills were acquired throughout the course of the programme.

Challenges encountered

It is acknowledged that there were unexpected difficulties in collecting the data.

These were:

- Time-scales planned for questionnaires were unachievable. Although managers had agreed to accept the questionnaires, and agreed a turn around date, many were late arriving, a high number had to be chased up, duplicates were sent out in some instances, and some were not returned at all. Additional settings were approached to meet the target numbers.
- Initially it was intended to have in-depth case studies of six settings. Despite agreeing, and a number of reminders, the sixth (setting 18)

- procrastinated. I had almost completed the data collection for the other five so eventually I asked another setting to participate and I started the field research there. At this point setting 18 contacted me and gave me a date to start researching in their setting. I felt obliged to do this and so added a seventh setting for in-depth research.
- Participant observation was always going to prove problematic in a dynamic setting with young children. The two hour circular programme of time and event sampling in the settings could not be maintained due to interruptions, routines, and parents coming and taking the children away. I sometimes had to stop and start observations because children demanded attention which could not be avoided. Consequently considerably more time than the planned four hours per setting was expended.
- The researcher-introduced resources, delivered prior to the pre-arranged day they were to be used, could not always be used when I arrived; routine activities sometimes took preference (i.e. outdoor play time). A second visit had to be re-arranged.
- Sometimes the child I was to observe did not arrive, or went home early. In some instances an alternative child was chosen.
- I anticipated being able to speak to more parents in the settings than I achieved. Many were delivering their children and rushing off to appointments/ work, or arriving at the last minute to collect their child and go home. Others were prepared to speak to me but in talking to individuals or two together (recordings of comments were not differentiated having been recorded anonymously and all on one record sheet) in the short times parents were at the setting others had left, as they were not necessarily there all at the same moment.
- I recognised my cultural bias as viewed through an interpretive paradigm on one visit where I was told all staff and children were white, in a largely all white location. In one playroom a board had children's names on. Names were stored in a tub beneath it, and children found their own names and placed them on the board as they arrived. I looked through

the names and found one card in a different colour with a Star of David on. I was startled, my instinct being that this belonged to the one Jewish child I had been told attended this setting who was being singled out. As a researcher I had a dilemma. My intention had been to observe and record but not to interfere with actions of the practitioners. I had to choose to either ignore or challenge it. After the observation I had the opportunity to speak to the named-practitioner in private and raise the issue; I felt I could not in all conscience leave without saying something. She was shocked as it had never occurred to her that this is how it could be interpreted. She assured me the child was not Jewish but was having difficulty recognising his name. She hoped to help by giving him cues, offering a different coloured card and an arbitrary design – the star – something he could articulate. She decided to change the card for a different design.

- I also recognised a bias in myself prior to attending setting nine as my expectations of quality provision was not high. I was wrong. This setting was different but met the needs of the children admirably (see Chapter 6 – setting 9).

When this research began there was a relatively small amount of literature specifically on researching with young children. Education research was well established, but very young child in community care/ education settings were often taken out of the equation, researchers concentrating more on the significant adults in the child's life, other than in social developmental child studies. Young children were not expected to be active participants. This has now changed with a number of books appearing which are specifically targeted at research with young children. This can only be to the benefit of those wanting to provide quality service for children in their care in the wider aspects of development.

early childhood educators who develop a research-informed stance to their practice and to the interpretation of policy have an important part to play in the development of future research in Early Childhood Education.
(Nutbrown 2002:201)

With fewer settings and children it would have been possible to devise a research methodology where the children were the main gatherers of research evidence and active participants. Examples might be to take photographs of their friends or favourite activity, to stick smiley or sad faced stickers to charts by each activity, to choose their preferred snack, eat it, and draw a picture for the record. Kinney (2001: 20) advocates consulting with young children by showing photographs of activities and recording the children's comments, and using a flip chart with, for example, a picture of a digger on, asking the children what they would want in a new nursery and adding drawings and comments to the chart. She emphasises that consultation is only the start, that to be effective action must be taken and outcomes shared with the children. Clark and Moss (2001: 5) describe a 'Mosaic approach' to listening to and involving children in their own future. This is a multi-method approach including verbal and pre-verbal communication, participation, focuses on the experiences of the children, it can be adapted for all types of settings, and aims to be 'an evaluative tool and to become embedded in early years practice'.

It is often assumed that children, particularly very young children, have less experience, therefore less knowledge than adults, but this is not necessarily so in all areas. Some children may have travelled further than some practitioners, to India or Pakistan for example, experienced religious or cultural festivals known only nominally to the practitioners, or are able to speak more than one language. Children should never be underestimated.

Research is worthless unless there is rigour in both the collection and analysis of data. Care should be taken in the preparation of research instruments, in the consistency of collection of research data, and in the analysis of that data. All data should be well organised, stored, and become very familiar to the researcher.

The research is only valid when analysed and written up. Each piece of research is unique, and in relation to cultural identity in early childhood is a valuable tool in helping practitioners, trainers, and policy makers move the subject higher up the agenda by increasing knowledge and understanding for future practice.

Summary of chapter and into the next

In this chapter the purpose of the research into cultural identity in early childhood settings is identified. Theoretical perspectives are explored and an interpretive paradigm chosen for the research. Ethical considerations were made and taken fully into account as part of the research design and process. The research questions inform the research design as described, which takes into account the population samples and specific locations of the research sample. The piloting and implementation of the research demonstrates the comprehensive nature of the research design in a mixed methodology of research instruments. It ends with a critical reflection on the research.

The next chapter, the first of two findings chapters, describes the seven settings selected for in-depth research in the form of case studies. These demonstrate some of the variety of early years' settings available, both full-day and sessional, in locations in the inner city of Leicester and in the county of Leicestershire, and the huge variation of practice.

CHAPTER 4 - PRACTICE BASED CULTURE IN CONTEXT

There are, in every age, new errors to be rectified and new prejudices to be opposed. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

Experience is not what happens to you; it is what you do with what happens to you.' Aldous Huxley (1894 - 1963)

Introduction

This is the first of two findings chapters, this one presented as case studies. Seven settings agreed to collaborate in the research into cultural identity by admitting me, the researcher, for several visits, working with a named-practitioner to audit resources, observe the practitioner in action, and observe the children at play. In addition the named-practitioner agreed to an unstructured interview on their personal 'cultural journey' through life. In the case studies all the research questions are addressed through the various research instruments described in the previous chapter. Each setting provided parental and setting-questionnaires, a cultural audit was undertaken, practitioners and children were observed, practitioners recorded their 'cultural journey', some parents in some of the settings contributed their comments, and all settings were given a selection of researcher-introduced resources. Where parents contributed to the research by questionnaire, and referred to in the findings, these are identified by number following reference.

The settings were chosen from a range of possible locations, identified from the setting-questionnaires to be offering good practice. To give a range of settings they included full-day care and sessional sessions, in the inner city and the county, and to include one setting with all white children and practitioners. The experience is recorded here as a series of case studies, each one different, each one recording some different aspect of perception and practice; the whole experience demonstrating the richness of provision for our young children, the opportunities grasped and lost, the strengths and weaknesses. Narrative descriptions of the case studies are given in this chapter; the findings are further

discussed in the following chapters (Findings 2, and in Analysis and Discussion chapter).

Case Study/Setting	Description
I: Case Study – full-day setting identification 4	Based in the inner city, but not having the characteristics of an inner city setting. This setting has 40% of children from minority ethnic communities, but 100% white practitioners.
II: Case Study – full-day setting identification 6	This is the one setting in the sample for in-depth research with all white children, all white practitioners, in a largely all white county town.
III: Case Study – sessional setting identification 9	Catering for very young disadvantaged children on a high rise estate; many are children of refugee and asylum seeking families.
IV: Case Study – sessional setting identification 13	An inner city setting where 85% of children are from minority ethnic communities. Languages feature highly in this visual and verbal environment. The black named-practitioner adds her own perspective to resource provision.
V: Case Study – full-day setting identification 18	Experiencing the viewpoint of a male named-practitioner added to the perspective of this inner city setting
VI: Case Study – sessional setting identification 19	Sited in a community hall in an industrialised area of a county town this setting takes culture seriously. The practitioners, the children, and the parents are swept along on a wave of stimulation and interest.
VII: Case Study – sessional setting identification 22	Responding to children ‘in need’ and their families this setting has well trained practitioners offering high levels of professionalism in a challenging arena.

Table 7: - Order of case studies

I: Case study – full-day Setting: 4

The scene is set, the location established, affluent inner city, and parents wanting a nice safe environment for their children. This then is the place to be – as long as they are looking for multi-cultural resources and an emphasis on the three pivotal iconic festivals - Chinese New Year, Diwali, and Christmas.

In this case study I look at

- *the location and cultural environment of the setting*
- *the range of resources to reflect a multi-cultural environment*
- *the inexperienced practitioner*
- *training perceptions in mainstream and continuing professional development*
- *festivals, festivals, festivals*
- *parental involvement and resolving the balance between home and setting where conflict arises*

Think of the inner city and think of buildings crammed in small spaces, terraced houses and small backyards, few green spaces, hustle and bustle, and streets populated by people of every colour and costume. Not so in this part of the inner city where this setting is in a large converted detached Victorian villa, set in its own grounds, and surrounded by other similar properties – many of them now used for commercial or academic use. The setting is affiliated to a university and is used by its staff, students – including many overseas students, and the general public. Within buggy pushing distance is a large open green park, sheltered by mature trees, with a grand building defining the area. Twenty-four percent of this ward are from the minority ethnic population; many being university students living in multi-occupancy properties in the vicinity.

It might not be raining outside but the self-portraits under the umbrella on the wall keep the children in mind on a dull and blustery day. A happy, homely setting, with small group rooms and familiar adults is very attractive to parents. They want the comfort of knowing that their children will be well cared for, stimulated, and happy. The parental questionnaires indicate that many parents

have no desire to be directly involved in the setting, and indirectly that they have little awareness of what actually goes on in it. It is a question of trust. Here is a 'safe' setting, one that can be trusted. The logo of the setting is of a small child on the hands of an adult whose fingers arch above the child's head like a house roof; safe and secure.

Bienvido, benvenuto, welkom, willkommen, bienvenue, croeso, and welcome in many additional scripts greet parents, children and visitors as they enter this lofty building, long ago home to a prosperous Victorian. Inside a happy buzz indicates the children are busily occupied. Positive images dress the walls, a photograph of a smiling Chinese boy riding a bicycle, the welcome poster with multi-racial images, a wall of photographs of the children (important for parents to see their children happy in their environment) including individual children with Santa, and posters showing diverse families. A long banner proclaiming Happy New Year - Kung Hey Fat Choy - and the Chinese characters proclaim the current festival being promoted.

Each child is recognised through a picture character and their name on a coat hook, that small feature which defines them as 'belonging' and a link between home and setting, the parent and the child. A notice-board gives parents the information they need, in English, about the setting, including a topic plan for the week. Staff photographs enable parents to identify pertinent personnel by face and name, this also shows that all of the staff here are white. This is unusual, for a setting so close to the city centre, not to be representative of the local population, particularly as one third of the children are from minority ethnic communities.

Social times make everyone feel better and here, in this setting, the lunch-time routine provides one such experience for the children. Returning from hand-washing and sitting in their regular places at the tables, the children have a fit of the giggles when the practitioner leads the singing of funny songs with which the children are obviously familiar. Between songs the children communicate well

with each other. The children demonstrate this is a regular routine and they respond well to being called by name and given the responsibility of collecting knife, fork, spoon and beaker from the practitioner. There is more collective involvement as they wait for the food as they recite days of the week, numbers, and complete the weather chart. On the imminent arrival of lunch, always a vegetarian option and special diets catered for, the children strike up in a chanting sing-song voice 'dinner's coming, dinner's coming'; rhythm and words even those with limited English will soon grasp. Eating lunch at the tables with the children the named-practitioner has the opportunity to stimulate conversation, listen to them, answer questions, and inform. Wide ranging discussions flipped from countries and cities, countries the children had connections with, to shapes (of earrings – triangles), to addresses and numbers.

Well resourced, the shelves metaphorically groan under a weight of multi-cultural resources, books with titles like Chinese New Year, Noah, and Dat's New Year, alongside diverse storybooks and non-fiction, a world globe, games and jigsaws, showing a multitude of multi-cultural activities, easily accessible and ripe for selection. Largely selecting their own activity, or joining one of the tables with a pre-arranged craft activity or toy the children have free play opportunities.

The named-practitioner, during the unstructured 'cultural journey' interview, took me through her awareness of cultural issues. She was cognizant throughout her primary school years that not everyone looked like or lived like her family, 'you start looking and there's different coloured people about', single parent families, and 'a friend who was a Jehovah's Witness'. She tried to understand by asking questions of them, acknowledging it was out of interest 'I never thought it was a problem I just wanted to know'. An overheard racist comment during secondary school was the first time she was conscious of such things and she thought it 'not very nice'. Despite growing up and living in Leicester, cultural awareness sat lightly on her shoulders.

Training at college to work with children was when the named-practitioner was formally introduced to cultural issues. Visiting different religious buildings, writing about different religions, was 'quite interesting' and she hoped it would be of use when she started work. Sweepingly she asserted 'I started working here ... and as you have seen we do all the different festivals and we celebrate everything'. I would have needed a much longer period of research to confirm or deny this, and it was outside the remit of the research programme. Her cultural awareness was firmly fixed on the celebrating of festivals.

Many practitioners find it difficult to deal effectively with young children's identities and gender, and the changing cultural identities of children in the context of their first education and care experiences outside the home.
(Moyles 2007)

In response to the setting-questionnaire question relating to the training of practitioners in cultural identity in the early years it was stated that they had been trained 'within nursery nurse training'. Asked if they would like to receive such training their response was 'no'. The reason given for feeling it is not required covers such areas as:

We feel with such variety of children from different countries, including parents to speak and show their own country's cultures and with other resources; develops a strong relationship with parents.

This approach would seem to limit the continuing professional development of the practitioners as, from the description above, the training of the named-practitioner on cultural awareness only appeared to impact on religious knowledge. Of the six parental-questionnaires submitted three of them referred specifically to festivals as the means the practitioners have to promote cultural identity:

- | | |
|--|-------------|
| Celebration of a range of festivals including Diwali, Chinese New Year, Christmas and Easter | (parent 9) |
| With the topics covered such as religious festivals | (parent 10) |
| Celebrate a range of festivals | (parent 12) |

Parents seem to have a limited awareness of the opportunities for cultural identity development within the setting and they, like the practitioners, see the external manifestations of religious festivals as the marker.

Of the settings visited for this research this was the one with the most comprehensive multi-cultural resources file of dates and celebrations and to-do activities related to them. It ranged from Australia Day to Halloween, Diwali to Eid, and Harvest to Chinese New Year. Although the most comprehensive seen it was nevertheless heavily weighted towards British and Christian festivals – Easter, Advent, Bonfire Night, Christmas, and many saints – St. Valentine, St. Patrick's Day, St. Andrew's Day, St. George's Day, Saint Lucia.

As with many settings, the festival calendar seems to pivot around Christmas, Chinese New Year and Diwali. The named-practitioner recognised her limitations in knowledge, understanding, and presentation of alternative festivals; indeed she made no specific reference to any other festival.

Christmas I know about, so I can go over the top with things like that. I try my hardest to do all the other ones as well, it's not easy, but you can't do everything, if you try to do all the religious festivals all the year through, you'd be doing one every day, so we just try, and the major ones.

We've got Chinese New Year coming up, we do that every year ... that's quite a big one ... the other big one to go for is Diwali.

On the stair wall leading to the pre-school room a giant dragon, decorated with components hand-printed by the children, and completed by the practitioners, prepare the children and visitors for the 'dragon's den' upstairs. One of today's activities takes the theme on. A group of children settle themselves around a table with a practitioner. They are shown pictures of dragons in books, talk about them, and are given an explanation about the role of Chinese dragons at New Year. Given paper and a selection of pencils, crayons, and felt tips the children are encouraged to draw their own version.

Prompted, during the telling of the 'cultural journey', to share instances in the setting associated with the different backgrounds of the children, the named-practitioner related it to a previous Chinese New Year.

We've had quite a few Chinese families here and they are really helpful when it comes to it, really want to get involved and help. We've had a couple of parents who've come to cook a Chinese dinner ... All the children absolutely loved that and we all got into it. I suppose that was quite nice to see.

On a one-to-one basis the named-practitioner gave a child a piece of card with a zig-zag shape already drawn on it. The child was encouraged to finger-tip paint on to the zig-zag, from a choice of three colours – green, red, and yellow. This was then cut out by the practitioner and mounted on to a folded card. The child was asked to draw a picture of a goat to stick inside, this being the year of the goat. The practitioner wrote the Chinese greeting 'Kung Hey Fat Choy' on the front. Other children were encouraged to make their cards in the same way, although there was no pressure for them to conform. The researcher's field notes record 'other plans include moving dragons and drums. All will be displayed before the children take the components home.'

An issue sensitively handled by the named-practitioner related to a Muslim family who did not want to celebrate Christmas, a big event in this setting. The child, a boy, found it quite hard when the other children were getting excited about Santa's imminent arrival. The named-practitioner and the father discussed how they could resolve the issue to everyone's satisfaction. The practitioner suggested:

that a 'present' day would be quite nice. He doesn't feel he's losing out here, but he's sticking to what mum and dad want at home. That worked out quite nicely, but it was still hard to try to involve him in that, because he had been involved in every other celebration. But to try and involve him in this big one, a lot of white children here, a lot of Christian children, this big one they are all talking about and it's really exciting. He seemed quite happy. It seemed to work out all right, he was quite excited, mum and dad were quite happy with what we had done so ...

Parents are a resource in this setting and the practitioners look for some others who are willing to become involved, especially at festival time. The most recent Ofsted report 16.08.2004 cites, among other things, examples of 'what is being done well':

- Staff work closely with parents and build positive relationships with them
- All children are respected and a good range of positive resources are provided which reflect diversity
- Parents and children are greeted warmly and parental involvement is encouraged

A second example of parental involvement, recalled by the named-practitioner, related to the festival of Diwali.

We had the parents come in and talk to the children about wearing saris. One parent brought us a huge box of saris and we dressed the children up last year, and it was really, really nice.

II: Case Study – full-day setting: 6

A willingness to look and learn, a keenness to raise the bar, and a commitment from the practitioners, are all present in this out of the way place tucked into a white-washed corner of the county. Rubbing shoulders with Indians, or bumping into a Bangladeshi on the street corner would be unusual here, where 'foreign' is understood as strawberries from Kenya or a curry from the Balti. Things are changing – but only slowly.

In this case study I look at

- *how training could do with improvement*
- *how parents need to know what is happening in their setting*
- *cultural learning for practitioners*
- *misplaced views*
- *resources to aid identity*
- *redressing the balance*

All the faces are white in this setting, and it is not surprising as it stands tucked in the centre of this mainly all white county town. Only three percent of the population in the area are from BME communities, compared to an average of 7.3% overall in the county. The purpose built building, with a small outdoor play area, is modern and welcoming. A parental notice-board, a welcome poster in many languages, and photographs of the staff greet the parents in the entrance hall.

The named-practitioner, qualified for five years, is not untypical of the practitioners in the setting: mostly brought up in the area, having little contact with the minority ethnic population, and being largely unaware of the benefits cultural diversity has on the development of young children.

Even at college, as far as other cultures go, ... there wasn't many people from other ethnic backgrounds. I think there was probably one or two, and the same in school. I don't know whether it's the area that we live in ... even now in our village there's not one family from a different ethnic background.

I don't think college ever prepares you enough for your experiences in the work setting. I don't think there's enough training goes on What I did was not enough, it nowhere near prepares you for the work setting.
(named-practitioner)

The named-practitioner was aware that what she did was not sufficient. She had little recollection of having considered cultural diversity during her two year childhood studies course. 'As far as good practice goes, celebrating other cultures, a lot of what I've learnt is within the workplace rather than at college.' This view is not confined to the United Kingdom. Research in Australia found that two-thirds of early childhood degree students in their final year said that 'the practicum component of their course had given them no experience of culturally responsive and respectful curricula' (Mac Naughton and Hughes 2007: 190).

Three questionnaires were returned by the parents, and they too had given little thought to the impact of cultural awareness on their children. None of the parents feel that the things that *they* do in the setting have any influence on the development of cultural identity of the children, unaware that they were reinforcing white English culture. One parent (18) did not think the practitioners helped their child develop a cultural identity within the setting. Parents 19 and 20 did and cited discussions and explanations about other countries, their food, customs etc., celebrating religious festivals, and learning about other cultures for example Chinese New Year, Diwali, and a project on a South American Indian boy and his family.

During the 'cultural journey' unstructured interview the named-practitioner recognised her limitations and lack of experience in the cultural arena. Her memories are not necessarily positive ones.

Obviously we are aware of other cultures, but my dad is fairly prejudiced ... he's always told jokes about black people and he does impressions of them. ... in our family my dad's cousin, her dad is black and mum was white. I remember as a child that .. was ... quite strange ... I could never understand why she was like that. I suppose that's the only sort of cultural experience I can remember. (named-practitioner)

The cultural learning process for this practitioner is inevitably going to be prolonged, and more effort is required to transmit this awareness into the everyday routine of the setting. Parents are a great asset in the acquisition of cultural knowledge, often willing to share experiences when respect is given to their culture and religion.

From short courses I've learnt quite a lot; from the parents as well. We have got a Jewish family here, and she offered to come and do a talk with the children when we were doing Hanukkah just before Christmas. She came and talked to the children, and brought some candles and some food. And you know you are supposed to do it. (named-practitioner)

Parents, who have themselves not experienced much cultural diversity in everyday life, can make rather ambivalent statements. When asked their views on promoting knowledge and understanding from a range of cultures wrote 'I think it is positive and ensures cultural harmony in later life' (parent 18), and 'children benefit from learning about different cultures'. However, the end of this sentence reads 'but I do not feel that they should think of them as different cultures, just different places, celebrations etc. i.e. do not foster racial differences' (parent 19). Here 'race' and culture become muddled and, it seems, to distance the parent from the possibility of making a racist statement, appears to infer there is no difference between people. Parent 20 implies that by considering the promotion of knowledge and understanding from a range of cultures there is a potential threat to his or her own culture.

It is very important although I believe English culture should be taught in the greatest detail so that children are aware of the cultural heritage of this country where they live (parent 20)

There is a belief among some that 'white people in England are not allowed to express their own cultural values ... and that multi-culturalism is to blame. ...' (Hundal 2007). White culture is dominant in this setting, not least because of the ethnicity of practitioners and children, while introducing many images of ethnically diverse people, happy birthday and welcome posters in multiple languages in each play room, with a commitment to training, and a positive attitude.

An interesting aspect of this 'cultural journey' interview is the demonstration of growing awareness of the need for greater cultural diversity in the setting, especially because it is all white. As has already been demonstrated, a white Jewish family in the area is transferring a cultural lens to a different way of living. Awareness grows as more knowledge is disseminated to the practitioner. An example of this is given in relation to a staff meeting:

... we had a talk on equal opportunities and it made me more aware, and yes we do celebrate other cultures, and we do that, but we only do it like – Chinese New Year. 'Oh the Chinese New Year's coming up we must do

something on that'. 'Mother's Day is coming up we must do ...' It made me aware we are not doing it all the time. Yes we celebrate festivals but we do need to do more all the time. That was only a few weeks ago after we had this talk and I thought yes we are guilty of only doing it ...

(named-practitioner)

This particular practitioner is demonstrating a progression from being almost totally unaware of cultural differences, to developing an awakening awareness which is interesting her more and more. From the comfort zone of a cycle of festivals to an awareness that culture can be a part of the everyday routine.

Researcher: *What sort of thing would you think you should be doing?*

... we've got the multi-cultural food, food play, things like that, but maybe ... it's little things like this – I bought some croissants at home, and they were going out of date the next day, and I had a huge packet of them, so I brought some in for the children. We were talking about France, we usually do that when we're doing places around us, but there is no need to wait until ...(then), and they were loving it. 'We've got croissants and they're from France'. Just little things like that, you don't have to wait until you're doing places around us to do France, Spain ...

I think we do need to be more aware and maybe look into what we could be doing more often and not just the usual topics at Christmas – you do Christmas, in January you do Chinese New Year, Hanukkah in November. We do need to ...

(named-practitioner)

Parents with children in full-day settings often see very little of the practice in the setting. One parent (18) indicated that she attended parents meetings on a regular basis, but the other two had no involvement with the child's setting and did not want to. This therefore limits their ability to comment on the performance of the practitioners and on practice, as they may only be seeing a few minutes at drop-off and pick-up time. Asked if they could suggest any ways which practitioners would benefit from further training or information on cultural identity, one parent said 'no' (20), one 'do not think this is applicable' (19), and the third (18) that staff had a good knowledge of other cultures, but that the child's own culture is not explored in the same way. This despite the fact that Christmas at least features highly on the setting's annual plan – with Christmas party photographs on the wall.

Opportunities for raising awareness sometimes come from unexpected places. The named-practitioner described an incident which set her off on another voyage of discovery.

I had an interview last year ... they asked me questions about if we had a family of travellers. Gave me different scenarios – what would I do ... We never do much about that and I looked into it ... there's a toy library ... that provide all the resources with caravans and things in them. Things like that we do lack. When we do homes we do flats, big houses, we do all different ones but we have never really done much about caravans and travellers. That is something we have been looking into.

(named-practitioner)

... with the Early Learning Goals ... there's quite a lot in there about children respecting other cultures. There's quite a lot in that. Really that's when we sort have been thinking about travellers and things.

(named-practitioner)

The setting has been working with the Early Learning Goals and the practitioners need to look through a cultural lens in order to see what it means. Once the process of 'open-eyedness' has started it is difficult to stop. The named-practitioner has recently been promoted to deputy manager and will be taking on a leading role in the setting. I asked if she would take these thoughts, like obtaining traveller resources for the setting, into her new role.

Oh yes, definitely. I've been involved in buying equipment ... as the (setting) grows that is definitely something we will look into. We opened six years ago here and I don't think ... there was as much around ... as there is now.

(named-practitioner)

The pre-school room containing the eldest children in the setting has a collection of dolls, including black dolls, and dolls with disability equipment. The children were observed tending the dolls and the named-practitioner told me a story which quite incensed her.

I attend a management course and a couple of months ago we were doing posters promoting (settings) ... We had some old Argos catalogues and I was looking in there ... looking for toys ... looking for multi-cultural dolls ... and there was nothing, nothing, no black dolls or any other skin coloured dolls, there was none. When you look through the NES Arnold and Galt there's a lot more in those, but they are very expensive. In the Argos catalogue you've got dolls, probably ten pounds each, if not cheaper, but there's no black ones, which surprised me quite a lot. I've never really been aware of it before.

You do definitely have to pay more money for things like that. Really why should you have to? That's what probably would put (settings) off; they've not got that sort of money (named-practitioner)

Having said that, a few years ago they were few resources available to promote cultural diversity, and now there are many more, I asked the named-practitioner if it might be more to do with her growing awareness that she now saw them, whereas previously she missed seeing them as she was not tuned in to these subtleties.

It could be, I am definitely more aware now and I do look for it more. ... we have budgets ... and we buy for our own rooms. You're always looking at getting something ... you've not already got, or something promoting other cultures. I think I am more aware now, but I think ... there is a lot more now. (named-practitioner)

Impressions of this setting are that it is presenting diversity in an all white environment with some degree of success. Practitioners have to work so much more consciously, and develop professional awareness, when they do not have that diversity within or in close proximity to their setting, and this setting is achieving this. Further investigation revealed a commitment to cultural diversity, even though that was starting from a low base, and a recognition that they have to continue to work on cultural diversity in the interests of the children. The named-practitioner has been 'awakened' culturally and the results should be demonstrated over time. It can be expected that this will be reflected in future practice.

Leaving a space for comment on a questionnaire enables respondents to say things that do not fall into other categories. There are some which demonstrate a lack of awareness, like the comment from parent 19 'I do not think young children need a real cultural identity – just need to be aware of different cultures'. Had the parent been more informed that comment would not have been made, and they would be aware that we all have a cultural identity, even a very young child.

III: Case study – sessional Setting: 9

I have an amazing story to tell, of childhood resilience, and the forces of natural development. Adults are often fearful of unfamiliar places and situations, even anticipated enjoyable ones. We hear all the time adults saying when it is suggested they have a new experience, 'I'll go if you come with me'. Yet the youngest in society are left, often alone, in vast rooms, with unknown people speaking languages they cannot understand, and come out smiling, confident, and communicating in such a short space of time. Who could fail to be impressed?

In this case study I look at

- *children of refugees and asylum seekers*
- *quiet first impressions*
- *identity changes, progress and development*
- *English as an additional language*
- *utilizing neighbourhood resources*
- *positive parents*

An island of high rise transitory communities cast in sea of deprivation, and surrounded by menacing major roads can be a frightening experience; especially so if you are a non-English speaking refugee or asylum seeker, the majority of those using this setting. Non-working parents needing a lot of support require not only good care for their children, but a sympathetic, understanding, listening ear. This can be difficult if no one speaks your

language, but this setting does all it can to accommodate these families in the best way they can.

It is important, especially for teachers and professionals who are working with a diverse group of parents and children, to be active listeners, cooperative learners, and open communicators.

(Lahman and Park 2004: 140)

Not only are the children in this setting economically and politically disadvantaged they are also the youngest participants in the research. A great deal is expected of immature, traumatised little children, uprooted from all they know, perhaps more than once, with distressed parents who cannot predict what the future holds. Skilled practitioners can contribute to the settling-in process, so that the setting and routine can reassure the children that it is a safe environment where it is acceptable for them to relax and play.

Migration to a foreign country creates a passage of time, which is commonly constructed as a 'transitional' period. It is a dislocating experience in which the migration process has its own crisis period ... the task for the family is in 'reshaping its new reality, maximizing both the family's continuity in terms of identity, and its compatibility with its new environment.'

(Dwivedi 1997: 64)

This setting gives the impression that the personnel are meeting the 'multi' needs of the children and parents – multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multi-faith - through the practitioners and students on placement, and the wider duty staff team in the building. Give it a 'multi-' and this setting can add a suffix.

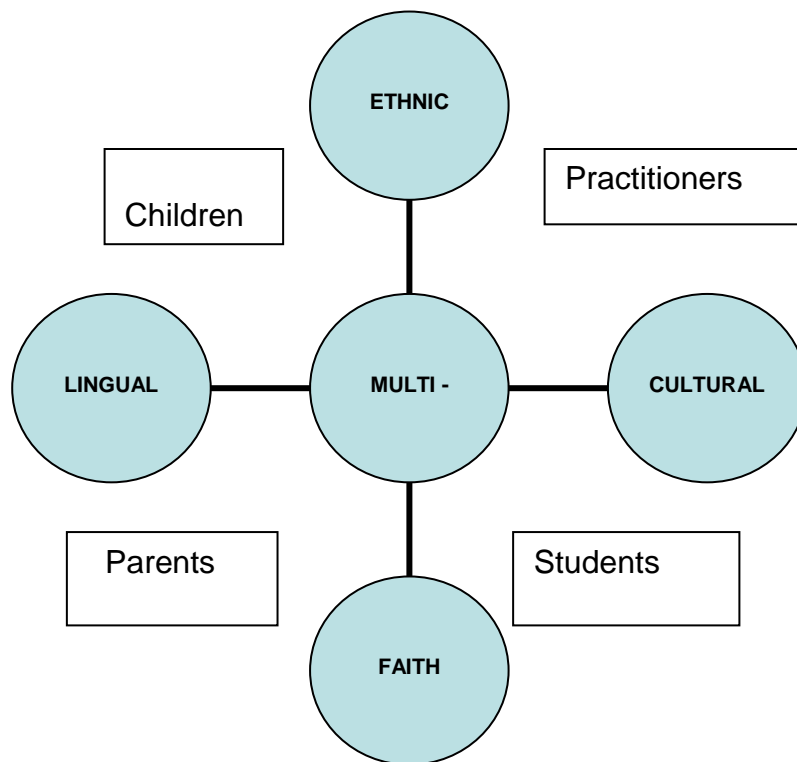


Figure 2: - Setting 9 'Multi-tude' Chart

On my first visit the children had only been attending the newly refurbished and reopened setting for four days. It was eerily quiet, there was none of the usual babble of little children, little crying, no laughing, just lost looking toddlers moving quietly from activity to activity sometimes engaging for a few minutes, then wandering on to next area that caught their eye. Practitioners stationed themselves around the room, observing, gently encouraging, smiling, but never insisting a child should stay with them, or at a particular activity. This was the overview I perceived. I was at the setting to meet the practitioners and conduct the visual audit of the cultural environment.

My next visit, for participant observation of the children and practitioners, occurred sixteen days later and I was immediately struck by the difference; the children were much more engaged with the activities and the practitioners. The setting is open for a morning and an afternoon session, the children all going home at lunchtime (it is very local provision) with some returning in the afternoon. Five children were observed over one morning and one afternoon

session. Three thirty-month-old children were observed, one twenty-four-month-old, and one fifteen-month-old, and their behaviour was not so different from many children of that age. A full-length mirror proved popular as the children came to terms with the recognition that that is what they look like, 'the real me'. The regular progress of social development (Woolfson 1993: 280) is being maintained in these children, with predicted language delay if heritage language is not used in the setting. With the exception of one two-and-a-half year old who barely communicated with the practitioners, there was considerable communication with the rest of the children verbally from adult to child, non-verbally child to adult, and child to child. Body language and cues from the practitioners aided the process.

Records of participant observation are shown in the table below. To maintain anonymity the children were not identified by name, but by the sticker given to them by the researcher. Their 'sticker name' is identified on the table.

Table 6 shows:

1. Column *one* shows the ages of the children, with the eldest at the top and the youngest at the bottom, plus the sticker identification.
2. Column *two* identifies how many exchanges of communication occurred, and indicates the heritage language
3. Column *three* indicates the frequency the child was seen in imaginative play and looking at themselves in a mirror
4. Column *four* identifies on how many occasions the child was watching others
5. Column *five* records the occasions seen when the child was playing alone
6. Column *six* shows narrative transcriptions made at the time observations took place

1	2	3	4	5	6
Age Sticker name	Communication/ Heritage language	Imaginative play Mirror watching	Watching	Solitary play	Comment Made on observation record sheets
2½ years Red/ Blue face	12 times French	2 times	8 times	4 times	Riding bike much of time
2½ years Yellow face	3 times Not English but not known	11 times plus mirror x 2	0	0	Pushing doll in pushchair. Home corner Fantasy box
2½ years Red Star face	13 times Somali	12 times plus mirror x 2	7 times	1 time	Understands language, points and uses non- verbal communication. No language heard
2 years Blue/ Yellow face	34 times English	2 times	4 times	8 times	Flitting around. Different adults giving attention
15 months Yellow/ Pink face	11 times Swahili	0	0	26 times	Most of time happily wandering around room. Made brief contact with equipment. Her reward was giving and receiving smiles

Table 8: - Partial record from participant observation tick sheets

Whilst acknowledging that this is such a small sample, it does illustrate the extent of communication with the one English speaking child, compared with the three non-English speaking older children. Solitary play, imaginative play, and watching others is how children initially feel more comfortable, it gives them a sense of security and as they become more confident language, or additional languages, start to emerge (Leicester City Council: 11).

The setting records look like a United Nations list of candidates at a conference, the difference being these children do not have simultaneous translation or an expense account. They are mostly from different African countries, with some of Asian ethnicity, and out of thirty-nine children on the register only two are white. Small groups of children attend at different sessions over the week. Experienced practitioners from different ethnicities and, between them, able to speak several languages are relaxed about the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the children and parents. Difficulties communicating with parents can at times be overcome as additional languages are sometimes spoken by childcare students on placement, or duty staff working in the building. The practitioners have no difficulty accepting children speaking unfamiliar languages, as they feel they can help the children to communicate, eventually in English, and demonstrate their professionalism to achieve that aim. This view is borne out by a recent survey undertaken by the Daycare Trust.

None of the workers spoken to felt that providing childcare to children with little or no English was a problem. Even in cases where neither the child nor the parent spoke English as a first language, communication is always possible according to participants who spoke of various ways of communicating with a child such as sign language and picture cards, which were often used for basic communication. (Daycare Trust 2008: 8)

Five days later I visited again, and what a contrast. The research field notes read:

Children happily playing, good interaction between adults and children. High adult/ child ratio. Full range of activities being utilised. Thirteen children and eight adults, one of whom is a grandparent and one employed to support a child with special needs.

Large house structure (in addition to home corner) contains chairs and a mirror. Door and ceiling are made of cloth and sari fabric. Little child going in and out through the sari, pushing chairs, looking in the mirror. Other children going in and out. Two Asian practitioners playing peep-po through the windows. Children enjoying experience.

This is a much more settled group. Some children had been distressed on my previous visit and not communicating well with one another. This day there is much more interaction between the children. Last time the children were less responsive, there was very little language used by them, today they are starting to speak to the adults. What a transformation. Baker (2007: 29, 31) describes the process of bilingual language development.

Children develop at different speeds in their bilingual language development. Just as some children learn to crawl, walk or say their first words earlier than others, so the speed of language development varies between children. This is even more so in the development of two languages.

... young children pick up language so easily. Language is acquired unwittingly, subconsciously ... Young children learn languages as naturally as they learn to run and jump, paint and play. They are not worried about their language mistakes, nor about finding the exact word. They are only interested in getting their message across and receiving needed information.

While it may not be possible for practitioners to understand the subtleties of every culture, however the universal development of children, coupled with the mix of ethnicities in the practitioners, goes some way to meeting these characteristics. For example 'In every society children develop a sense of themselves as physically separate' (Oatley and Jenkins 1996 43). The practitioners, able to speak a range of languages, cannot be expected to speak all of the languages of the children present in this particular setting. They are not in any way deterred by whatever is presented to them. My experience in seeing this transformation in such a short time is a credit to their professionalism. The practitioners are fulfilling the requirements of the setting's equal opportunity policy which includes the statement:

- The opportunity for children to communicate in their heritage language will be provided where possible

Break-time is a social experience that all the children can enjoy. These young children who, in under three weeks, have moved from bewilderment, solitary play, and non-verbal communication or no communication outside the home, are now wreathed in smiles and game for anything. They were enjoying the experience of washing hands and splashing around in the water ready for snack-time. The children sat animatedly at the table. The six adults took the lead, with the children joining in singing songs. Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star and Miss Polly had a Dolly were favourites, alongside a Gujarati nursery rhyme – such is the ability of the children that they now also know a few words of Gujarati too without even trying. The quietly spoken named-practitioner beamed with pride as the children joined in with actions, if not all the words, when they were singing in her home language Gujarati. One ‘star’ wanted to sing on his own and launched into Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star as the others politely listened. Praised and clapped by the adults, the children joining in the clapping and cheering.

Three days later I was back again for the last session of event sampling. The event was an excursion to the local library a few doors away. The setting is in a shared community hall, with specific adaptations and small discrete areas for the youngest users, for example a small baby room and children’s toilets and washroom. Consequently, resources and equipment are more restricted than a permanent setting solely used for that purpose, as it has to be set out and packed away on a regular basis. So local external resources play a significant part in the experiences the setting is able to offer.

Arrangements had been made for a story telling session, and I accompanied practitioners and children. Initially the children were encouraged to select books to look at with the practitioners and library staff. Soon they were gathered onto a carpeted area in the corner each child eagerly looking at their own and other children’s ‘finds’. What an exciting time especially if, as was most likely the case, this was the child’s first visit to a library. Parents had been invited to come along and, as the children settled to listen to a story, a mother with veil and niqab joined the group.

The story of 'The Hungry Caterpillar' was told by the children's librarian with the children encouraged to repeat words. Practitioners, three Asian, one black, one white disabled, were enthusiastic about the story, counting, and flapping their arms as the butterfly emerged much to the amusement of the children. The children were watching attentively as fresh fruit was removed from a basket in the telling of 'Handa's Surprise'. All the senses were stimulated as the fruit was passed around, smelling the mango, feeling the spikes of the pineapple. The children were praised and encouraged when they identified the animals in the story stealing the fruit from Handa's basket. This is an action story greatly appreciated by the children. One child, demonstrating his confidence, took it on himself to hand around tangerines from the basket, which were collected in at the end of the story. The children were ushered off to wash hands before re-assembling on the carpet. Plates of pre-prepared fruit pieces were handed round and all the children were willing to try tangerine, banana, pineapple, mango, and avocado.

From this setting, along with one other from the original 25 selected for the research programme, came the highest number of parental questionnaires. This, I think, indicates the engagement parents have to the work being undertaken by the practitioners. As might be anticipated, due to language limitations, comments were not very explicit on some, but where they were they were positive. Parents have good reason to be positive about this setting, especially as has been demonstrated here with very young children setting out on a journey of discovery and language in a strange and unfamiliar landscape.

IV: Case study – sessional setting: 13

Tucked away behind the school, overlooking a playing field brimming with happy chattering children, many of them Asian, this setting has a language of its own – multi-culturalism. Parents feel at ease where they feel comfortable, where they experience understanding of unfavourable aspects of society affecting them personally, where they know their children are welcome. This, then, is the place for them to be.

In this case study I look at

- *perception of identification*
- *multi-cultural awareness*
- *the value of language*
- *black and white experiences*
- *perceptions of lack of resources*
- *training desired*

This culturally diverse setting in a vibrant inner city area, with its high proportion of minority ethnic population - 58% Asians 41% Hindus - exudes multiculturalism in practice. First impressions reveal the purpose adapted building alive with cultural images. Parents and children arriving in the entrance area have the opportunity to read notices and guides in community languages, and see posters and pictures showing representations of the diverse users of the service.

We believe that it is essential for all children to be taught about as many different cultures/ religions/ peoples as possible. We feel that this is the way to promote a more tolerant, integrated, accepting society in the future and better understanding of each other now. (setting questionnaire)

Of the three parents returning questionnaires, two self-categorise themselves as Asian: Hindu, and Indian: Hindu. The third when asked 'Which of the following best describes yourself?', and given a choice of the census categorisation of ethnicity, referred to in the following chapter, wrote 'none (don't like little boxes)'. The second part of this section in the questionnaire refers to religion and parents are asked to tick one of the following: Hindu, Christian, Pagan, Jewish, Muslim, No religion, Other (please identify). This same parent answered 'No religion category – implies the existence of a god!!'. This parent is the chair of the parent management committee and also makes positive comments on the questionnaire.

The ambivalence to categorisation seems to be shared to a degree by the practitioners. Asked a similar question on the setting questionnaire to the one referred to above regarding ethnicity and religion, this time in relation to the children in their care in the two years prior to the research, this setting replied 'we do not have monitoring information in these categories. We only have information on religion which is voluntarily given by parents'; this indicated children of Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Jehovah's Witness, No religion, and religion not identified by parents. It is unusual for sessional settings not to keep monitoring information on ethnicity, as it is often part of the criteria for grant-aided funding on which many of them rely. Practitioners were asked to identify themselves by ethnic and religious categories and their reply was 'Staff have commented that they do not think colour is a good way of defining culture and prefer to categorise themselves by nationality', then define themselves as English Christian, Asian Christian, Asian Muslim, Asian Hindu, and Indian Hindu. Society imposes definitions of people judged by appearance, place of birth, parental or antecedent origins. Not using standard categorisation for ethnicity makes it difficult for a setting to ensure they target and recruit ethnically diverse practitioners if they are not identified in this way. The questionnaire matrix asked settings to identify the range of activities and resources, including human resources, they had to reflect a multi-cultural environment. This setting made 39 responses out of the 47 pre-selected categories offered by the researcher; in addition in the blank boxes they recorded an additional six factors.

Using home languages with children	Museum resources	Parent volunteers
Labelling of displays	Visitors from the community	Letters and information to parents

Table 9: - Additional resources identified on matrix by setting 13

This, with other areas identified, indicates that language features highly in this setting's philosophy and practice. The visual impact of the setting to the researcher was one of multi-cultural awareness, recognising the importance of language, the practitioners (four Asian, one black) the children (currently 85% minority ethnic, 15% white) and the general stimulating atmosphere.

We do a lot of work to promote children's positive self-image through self-portraits and feelings using mirrors. We also have resources that reflect their home lives. We do a lot of sharing of experiences and teaching in home languages. We also teach songs and stories in home languages.
(setting-questionnaire)

To examine a visual impact/ language category to include books, images, posters/ pictures, welcome posters in many languages, stories, wall displays, and dual language which are suggested on the questionnaire matrix this setting would score highly. The audit undertaken at the setting by the researcher included photographs of black families and white families, ethnically diverse posters and positive images, information in Gujarati and Urdu, multi-cultural books in a book corner, a painted border on the walls of numbers and pictures in Roman, Urdu and Gujarati script, and dual language charts and games. Multi-racial images of children and families on puzzles, activity cards, dolls house figures, and Duplo people were observed, as were signs in various languages in the imaginative play area which was set up as a shop. The children comfortably moved from activity to activity, the practitioners spaced out around the room joining in, supervising, allowing the children to select an activity and play on their own, with other children, or with a practitioner as appropriate. 'Some of the practitioners were moving around the room from activity to activity, others spending longer periods at one activity to participate, encourage, and develop play' (researcher field notes). From an external perspective this setting appears to meet the requirements of the promotion of language (the message that languages are valued and important) to meet the cultural requirements of the children from this community as described by Lahman and Park 2004: 134

The validity of parents' concern may be seen in the importance of language in transmitting culture. These perceptions are supported by early childhood and language theories which state that the child's language allows an understanding of their family culture in profound ways that go beyond the understanding of the spoken word.

Parents too supported the recognition of the importance of culture and languages. In response to the parent questionnaire inquiry regarding promoting knowledge and understanding from a range of cultures, parent 47 wrote:

This is an essential part of early socialisation. It is important to give children the opportunity to experience cultures, languages and social situations that expand their knowledge and broaden their tolerance and interest

Practitioners are generally aware that there is always more that can be done, and it was illuminating to hear the view of the named-practitioner in this setting. In this instance the 'cultural journey' recording was punctuated by prompts from the researcher. The practitioner is just starting on a career in this type of setting, having been an occasional schoolgirl helper in her mother's nursery, a parent, a foster parent, and a committee member for this setting for several years. She has yet to begin her early years training. Being a black child in Barbados and having white friends, one a very close relationship for many years, influenced this practitioner.

I'm black she's white, people always thought we were somehow related because we were always together, we played together, we were going into the city centre together and most people said that when they look at the two of us we resembled each other ... colour was never really an issue with me, because all people are the same. It's what's inside it's not what's on the outside.

After discussing her early life, in which she recognised the economic imbalance between her family and the white families she knew, she told me:

... my family never had a television until I was about eight years old, and all my white friends had televisions. I would watch television at their home. Then we got a television at home. Financially wise, I think, the families were, *of course*, better off than the black families.

... it was never an issue ... we shared things ... borrowed each others stuff

She seems to have taken it for granted that the white families were '*of course*', better off than the black families. Growing up and moving to England, she described her current family situation and we explored her views. With prompts (in italics) we moved to a discussion on the setting.

And what about resources that we see in (the setting), do you think they are adequate, good, or bad?

Moderate. There should be a lot more resources than there are.

What should there be?

Black dolls, books, Asian dolls, clothing, clay modelling to reflect different cultures ... and different sorts of information for all kinds black, white, Asian.

These are interesting comments following on from the setting's record of all the resources they have, and my own audit of the setting. Parents too have not suggested there is a shortage of resources for their children. An example of how practitioners help their child develop his or her cultural identity is given by parent 47:

by talking about cultural events throughout the year, and having equipment available for the children to explore and use in practical situations such as the home corner, book corner, and the art table.

This contrasted with the named-practitioner's 'cultural journey' interview. Asked if there was anything else she would like to add about her awareness of cultural differences and issues around culture, anything observed, read about, or she would like to develop herself said:

For a start in our (setting) we don't have quite a wide range of material for the children, so we should start getting some more materials so we can teach them about different cultures, the differences between different families ...

She confirmed she was familiar with what is in the setting 'most of it, I would say, yes', even though she had not been working here for long.

You say there could be more things here, can you suggest what things? Have you seen anything that could be useful for them to have in addition to those they already have?

We should have more books, posters, they have got a variety of different toys ... , but as far as reading books and posters we don't have much of that kind of display and we should have more of that.

And there are things you could do within the group?

Well as I say they have got a variety of things, but the reading material and the posters, we could have a bit more of that.

Are books borrowed from the library for the (setting)?

No

Out of eight tick-sheet observations of six children, and the named-practitioner in the setting, on only one occasion were books and storytelling a feature, which may partially be the reason for the named-practitioner to make the above comments. Books and a book corner are there, but perhaps do not feature as highly as the practitioners think they do. Recordings were made of the many opportunities taken for language in play and communication between adults and children, and children to children.

Practitioners at this setting had not received any training on cultural identity in the early years but expressed a desire to do so, having missed out on a place on a course 'around major religions/ festivals/ clothes/ food/ and ideas on how to promote understanding of them'. Parents too focused in on their perception of the significance of religion on cultural identity 'they (practitioners) are always involved in children's different religions and festivals, as well as different religious assemblies' (parent 48) and views on promoting knowledge and understanding from a range of cultures 'I think it is a great idea, especially for those who are very ignorant in other children's religions' (parent 48), and 'they (practitioners) talk about different celebrations' (parent 49).

The named-practitioner, while not having received early years training, was given training as a foster parent. I asked if they had considered culture, and she said they had.

And what did you think about the training that you had with them?

Well they made you aware of different lifestyles and not to assume everybody is the same, because everybody isn't

So do you think that raised your awareness of things that you hadn't really thought of before?

Yes it has. ... sometimes you take it for granted that what's OK with your family should be OK for other people as well, and it isn't, and you shouldn't, you should get your facts together first

Advice and targeted training would seem to be the issue here. The setting would do well to reflect on their practice, to assess the frequency and use of resources that they may be taking for granted, to reconsider the emphasis on religion as perceived by practitioners and parents as a prominent role in the development of cultural identity, and to call on the resources of the community (library services and 'they could involve parents more') (parent 48) to bring in new perspectives.

The final word is left with parent 47: 'rather than pointing out the differences we should as a society recognise the similarities and celebrate the differences'.

V: Case study – full-day care Setting: 18

Sandwiched in an inner city residential street, lined with parked cars, and nowhere to breathe between the houses, the early morning commuters push their buggies in one direction – to this setting. Inside a skyscape prepared by the children predominates, for Eid is almost here and there are celebrations to prepare for. Celebrations to share with friends and family, old and young, and the youngest here are certain not to miss out on such an occasion as this.

In this case study I look at

- *preparations for Eid*
- *words and music*
- *names equal identity*
- *introducing the named-practitioner*
- *picnic on a sari*
- *researcher-introduced resources*

This setting, located in an inner city area of Leicester where the minority ethnic communities form 82% of the local population, holds a secret. The quiet exterior hides a warren of purpose built rooms to house full-day care for children from babes in arms to school age. The walls and ceiling are bright with glittery moons and stars, the theme for the week, in preparation for Eid. Proximity to the centre of Leicester enables a take-up of 40% white children, where all children happily experience the frisson of anticipated excitement for the coming days. The children, Muslim or otherwise, may not appreciate the true meaning of this important event, but they know they are going to enjoy it.

Each child capable of clutching a crayon has their own Eid book, decorated like the moon and stars with gold and silver. In it there is a dot-to-dot mosque and star to complete and colour, a page of 'colour and count' moon and stars, an intricate prayer mat picture to colour, and a hand design with a flowery mehendi pattern to put the finishing touches to. The activities take place over a period of a few days, supervised by the practitioners, and in the short-term some of the completed pictures are displayed on the wall. This setting has a large, culturally diverse staff of which eleven are drawn from the minority ethnic cultural background of the local community, and three are white. There can be no mistaking that this setting is in a community where over half the population is Muslim.

Parents select this setting because they want their children to grow up in a tolerant environment, where cultural experiences can be shared. A white

English parent (58) has a positive attitude, and makes this abundantly clear, by responding to knowledge and understanding from a range of cultures:

Good ... interesting ... stimulating ...
Has to be handled correctly to avoid pointing out too many differences
that can segregate children in a culturally diverse (setting).
(parent 58)

Diversity is welcomed in the setting, with shared experiences, and involvement of the parents.

My children are Muslim and speak Swedish and English. I bake
traditional Swedish cakes at the Muslim festival of Eid.
(parent: 60)

Parental input adds richness to the cultural diet, the dried fruit in the curriculum cake, the adding and overlaying of aspects beyond the textbook description of a festival. How a culture is actually lived. Parents are appreciative of the cultural diversity of practitioners: 'some (practitioners) are Muslim and wear a head scarf, and there is a male Sikh (practitioner)' (60), 'I know there is a Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian here. Think that's good' (parent at setting); and of children, 'the whole approach should be about the positive nature of diversity and children should be developed as individuals' (58). The practitioners interviewed for the Daycare Trust (2008: 9) report:

... emphasised the importance of recognising and celebrating different cultures, ethnicities and religions in an inclusive way. Rather than ignoring religious festivals that some children could not participate in, workers spoke of ways to include all children in a way that was acceptable to all families. For instance, if a child could not participate in an activity that was incompatible with their cultural needs, they would be given another task or activity to do, or they would be given an adapted activity that was compatible with their needs. This was seen as a natural and acceptable approach by participants and one which, in their experience, did not stigmatise any particular ethnicities.

Referred to in the next chapter some parents have reservations about allowing their children to participate beyond the comfort level of their religion.

I draw the line at partaking in worship i.e. although I like my children learning about Christmas I do not let them partake in Christmas plays as they border on worship. I like my children learning about Diwali but they can't eat sweets offered to Hindu gods. (parent 60)

This not necessarily a view shared by many parents, but should be respected where it exists. Ann Birks (Jones 2004: 9) believes that by working with parents everyone can be accommodated. Consultation is the key; policies that give parents choice, respect for their views, and adjustments made where necessary.

Children from different backgrounds bring so much experience with them. There is so much diversity in the country and that can be seen as a problem, but it is emphatically not, it gives a new perspective on things. (Jones 2004: 9)

There can be no mistaking that this setting is multi-cultural, and multi-lingual, the walls are festooned with written and visual material. It is literacy in action. From the alphabet mat, to the children's names twinkling on diamonds in one room, to flower encrusted baby names in another, and flying high on kites in a third. More names on the coat pegs, and a birthday parade of children's photographs, names and date of birth on balls bouncing around a huge wall display of a juggling clown. Individual children are valued and respected here. Notice boards for parents urge healthy diet in the South Asian community, Diwali prayers, significant dates for the year, contacts for voluntary organisations, and details of Navratri and Dussehra festivals.

A search of the book shelves reveal multi-cultural books, dual language books, music tapes – including ones with singing in English and other languages, lively Indian music, Swedish lullabies, carols and Christmas songs, and rhythmic Caribbean sounds. Despite having a wealth of resources, which are shared across the rooms, the setting is a regular and heavy user of the local library. Describing their approach the setting-questionnaire cited:

Singing a variety of songs, reading books with dual language ... some of the (practitioners) use their mother tongue (not English) to describe things to the children (water, food, boy, girl, play, etc)

English nursery rhymes on one staff notice-board gave all the practitioners, whatever their background, the opportunity to share established traditions with the children. There is no excuse for practitioners not to be up to date with information and ideas, as it is all readily visible and accessible on their own noticeboard in every room. There are daily plans, weekly curriculum plans, and the long-term view on the yearly plans. At the time of year this research is placed, the curriculum is naturally around the theme of Eid, with Eid cards and displays, sticking stars and moons, imaginative play with dressing up and Asian pots, all related to the subject. The weekly plan for the older children includes something I have not seen before in this type of setting an 'understanding of Eid and Ramadan', and the prospect of a visit to a mosque.

With the fun comes responsibility. Personal names are part of who we are, part of our identity, and important to learn. Walking around the lunch tables four children, were given two names each of children attending today, and were encouraged to put them down at individual place-settings on the table. When the rest of the children arrived some recognised their own names and, none too subtly, moved the cards to where they wanted to sit! This is obviously a familiar name recognition activity.

The named-practitioner is a popular character in this setting. Well, well, well. *Well* trained to NNEB Diploma level (National Nursery Examination Board) with ongoing continuing professional development (CPD), *well* loved by the children, *well* respected by the parents, the named-practitioner has the qualities and attitudes that play a major role in any setting. Working in the inner city suits him perfectly. He told me:

I always liked working in the inner city areas of Leicester ... I've been to other places ... like Oadby and Stonegate ... it's just that I felt happier

... I was brought up ... in inner city Belgrave. I just felt more comfortable there. Comfortable and happy in my own surroundings (with the) different cultures ... I've (worked) here for six years now and I've loved that'

His personal and professional experience over many years has raised his awareness of discrimination, racism, lack of black role models, prejudice, crude jokes made against Jews and Asians in particular, and given him the roundedness of understanding required to offer balanced views. It is with this background the named-practitioner is able to offer support and sensitivity to the work. Comfortable in his identity he said 'working with the children ... I just found myself. My name (a Sikh name) really spells my identity ... it is who I am'. This confidence gives the practitioner the insight required to work with others, children, parents, and colleagues, whatever their background. Whatever the beliefs of the parents they are truth to them, including religious beliefs, and this must be respected.

It is a sensitive issue that needs to be handled carefully (parent 60)

There is not simply a pre-existing reality or truth. 'Reality' or 'truth' occurs in the interaction, interpretations, and symbolic representations that people form through lived experiences (Lahman and Park 2004: 134)

The visual impact of the setting gives subtle messages that are internalised by children, parents and practitioners. On reflection one parent (58) said cultural identity was developed indirectly by 'using motifs of different kinds of fruit trees from around the world in a mural gives a global cultural context'. Both direct and indirect messages are given to parents through the displays, notices, and how practitioners respond to them, their children, and one another, even in the short time they may be in the setting.

A ten minute event-sampling observation gave a little insight, if somewhat gender stereotyped, into encouraging co-operation, while respecting individual feelings. The scene is set: with some ceremony and a lot of helpers, as a folded sari is spread out on the floor. On one side of the room a wide range of dressing up costumes hang on a rail and boys are asked to pick a girl to take to

the clothes. Several couples leave happily enough, but one boy refuses because he 'does not like girls'. He is given the task of inviting his friends to tea and set out the Asian serving pots and plastic food on the sari. The common experiences of making friends, getting dressed, giving invitations to friends, preparing the action, and having a picnic are shared by all the children. The difference may be in who they have as friends, the clothes they choose to wear, the uniqueness of a sari for a tablecloth, the possibly unfamiliar stainless steel utensils, and relying on non-edible pretend food.

Although the setting is well resourced, the natural curiosity of children with something new overcame them when the researcher-introduced resources were brought out by the named-practitioner. The large people cut-outs took the children by storm. Eagerly scooping up the shapes they started sorting them into categories. Matching by size they identified families, and then individual characters were given roles to play. The figure in the wheelchair was being given a tour of the setting; she was held upright and pushed as if the wheels were moving. The stimulus of the setting pushed two girls into story telling as they acted out a family saga. Having a chat seemed a natural action for some as the figures' faces, for most characters as they are held upright on the table with the child seated, are on a level with their eyes. Less confident children are standing back and watching (Woolfson 2003: 200), a natural early stage of socialisation before they feel ready to join in.

On another occasion the named-practitioner brought in some researcher-introduced resources of a set of three generation family figures, cut out of card. No instruction was given by the researcher to their use, so the practitioner initially led the children to look closely at them, and later left them alone to see how they were used. The researcher field notes read as follows:

Practitioner spread the figures out on the table. Picked one up at a time and asked children for a description – gender, clothes, colours. Children keen to match them up as families. Practitioner asking ‘Do you think these people belong to a family?’ Children happy with multi-racial families. Children on their own with the figures. One girl had collected all the children. Girls more engaged than boys.

Opportunities were given for the children to look carefully at the make-up of the characters, their features, ages, outfits, and relationships to stimulate discussion. Facial features and skin colour were much less importance than gender, hair colour, and age. There was true racial and cultural integration in the family members the children chose. In the activities in the setting the parent (58) who made the following comment would be well pleased.

Need to bring out the fullness of diverse cultures as well as similarities.

VI: Case study – sessional Setting: 19

Busy, busy, busy, would describe this setting. Good one-to-one work with the children which builds self-esteem, encouragement, and stimulation, making the whole approach a positive one. The setting has devised its own strap-line on the setting-questionnaire, in response to examples of good practice related to the development of cultural identity, ‘we try to highlight the richness of diversity’.

In this case study I look at

- *cultural sensitivity to language*
- *language opportunities in play*
- *the intimate world of books*
- *puppet potential*
- *parents have a part to play*
- *promoting cultural identity through practitioners*

It is hard to believe that this setting does not have permanency in this building. First impressions are that it is a hive of activity, interested parents gather in a little waiting area created just inside the door, locked for security purposes, and

eager children determined not to waste a minute of their time at play. The management of the community hall is very accommodating in allowing this creative group to operate as it does, to the benefit of the community, in the main hall of the building.

Cultural sensitivity and language acceptance are foremost in this setting where 40% of the children are from minority ethnic groups. This is not surprising as it is like a magnet, where those who feel comfortable with its values, are drawn. The setting has a long and detailed Equal Opportunities Policy which includes the following statements:

- Bilingual/ multi-lingual children and adults are an asset. They will be valued and their languages recognised and respected ...
- Information, written and spoken, will be clearly communicated in as many languages as necessary.

Where the setting can draw in additional resources to support their aims they do so. One example was given by the named-practitioner:

A Bengali speaking practitioner is in today. She is employed by Social Services to come in once a week to communicate with the children in their own language, and read stories to all the children. She is totally committed to all children learning more than one language from a very early age.

This view is supported by Lahman and Park (2004: 140) who identify the conflict parents have in wanting their children to learn English, yet not wanting them to become too acculturated due to speaking the English language.

English language acquisition, while important and desired, may also undermine the culture of the family.

This can be a difficult decision for parents whose heritage language is not English, because they want their children to succeed at school and beyond. On the setting-questionnaire a statement is made that:

Some parents from Asian backgrounds specifically send their children to learn 'English'. They are sometimes surprised we have books in Bengali etc. and sing songs not only in English.

Research (Baker 2007: 75-76) shows that 'there is no limit to a child's language learning capacity the child has enough capacity in the brain for learning two or more languages. Some two-thirds of people in the world are bilingual ... (this) show(s) that bilingualism and trilingualism are perfectly possible'. So, by offering the opportunities in this setting for speaking their home language in addition to English, it is a very positive experience, fully exploited by this setting.

In contrast to some of the other settings visited by the researcher, language - in whatever is the most appropriate one - and language opportunities in play is high in this setting's estimation. The children are stimulated and eager to participate. This approach is not a universal one as shown by this comment in a Daycare Trust (2008:2) document:

A recent Ofsted report found ... that 'support for children from minority ethnic groups was sometimes patchy, particularly for children who used English as an additional language'

High on the list of language opportunities in this setting is imaginative play. Not restricted to the home corner, although this is in evidence as a good experience, with its play food, ethnically diverse dolls and a wonderful array of dressing up clothes. Children are observed to adopt their own selection of outfits for wearing in various combinations – like Asian costumes with fairy wings – and when taking part in any, likely or unlikely, activity they choose. Saris are put to alternative uses by the children, assisted by practitioners, by draping on the climbing frame to form an alternative 'house', or round a wooden frame to make a puppet theatre. From the macro to the micro, imaginative play is acted out in the dolls house, with multi-racial people being positioned in various rooms, a small-play school with diverse figures, and a doll in a wheelchair being manoeuvred around. There is abundant communication between practitioners and children.

Statements made by the setting in their various documentation, most of it targeted at and available to the parents, can be seen being implemented in practice.

... we usually provide a specific creative activity such as junk modelling, sponge painting or perhaps a group art project. We like to ENCOURAGE as many children as possible to join in these projects and produce THEIR OWN versions of the work. We believe that our role in this is to assist them where necessary NOT to interfere with their finished product and we don't force anybody who really doesn't wish to be involved.

Children are encouraged to be independent, to make their own decisions, and to use resources and equipment in ways that best suit their purposes, under the watchful supervision of the practitioners who ensure the safety of everyone.

Story telling and books feature highly in this setting. Not tucked away in a corner but featured centrally along one wall, an emotionally comforting and 'safe' enclosed book 'cave' is positioned. Access is via a narrow entrance, a curtain swag, constructed from a large Indian designed scarf, its long fringe sweeping the faces of the children as they bend low to enter, creates a sensual experience in anticipation of the thrill of the story. This intimate area, accommodating only two or three children, plus sometimes a storyteller, is where children can experience books at a time of their choosing. As would be expected of such a setting the books are chosen with great care to include appropriate multi-cultural images and content, with several in dual language in a variety of scripts. This fulfils another statement from the setting's Equal Opportunities Policy:

Materials will be selected to help children develop their self-respect and to respect other people by avoiding stereotypes and derogatory pictures or messages about any group of people.

The setting makes it quite clear that it is verbal and non-verbal language and words that are important to them, but that they do not teach them to read. In the parents' welcome pack they state 'we try to get them to enjoy language, the pictures and the stories give the appetite for learning to read'

Today the traditional English story of the three little pigs is told. Some of the children demonstrate their artistic skills by drawing pigs; others build houses by cutting and gluing cardboard boxes and recycled materials. At break time practitioners and children gather around three tables, firstly counting how many are there, then going on to discuss the morning's activities. The children are asked to recall the materials used for the pigs' houses; more language opportunities. Later I asked the manager if any parent had ever objected, on religious grounds, to drawings of pigs, or pretend sausages in the home corner. No objections have ever been received; the only conditions placed by parents are on food given to the children. Kendall (Lahman and Park 2004: 131) recognises the importance of knowing about the children, their families, and traditions and enabling them to grow and develop within that culture.

All children deserve our best efforts at finding out about them and their cultures and fashioning an environment in which they are comfortable enough to rise to the challenges of growing and learning.

In an area where changeable resources enable the children to organise role play and stretch their imagination, today's theme is a puppet theatre. On some previous occasion the children had obviously decorated a large frame with ethnic designs and today they had added a sari to hang in front for a shadow puppet show. The named-practitioner informs the children a little bit about the global background of shadow puppets, while demonstrating how to make one from card mounted on a stick. With adult assistance where required, the children, actively involved and interested in what they are doing, make their own version of a Javanese shadow puppet. Stories developed from the children's puppets, and this encourages other children to have a go. To start things off, an electric light is switched on, shining from behind the screen, and the practitioners with commercial shadow puppets show the children how to tell a story. Individual children, encouraged to turn-take, work their own puppets with help from practitioners. After a practice run all those who want to do so settle themselves in front of the theatre for the 'puppet show of the day'. The children are in control of this performance.

Parents play a part in this setting to the level they are able. There is regular communication; an open door at the beginning and ending of the session when they can talk to practitioners and 'many stay 15 minutes or more at the beginning of the session just to have a chat with their friends' (setting-questionnaire). Encouragement is given to experience being a parent helper, invitations to attend events and parties, and information sharing and advice sought. The Equal Opportunities Policy makes it clear how they want parents to be involved:

- Children and families who celebrate at home festivals with which the rest of the group are not familiar will be invited to share the festival with the rest of the group, if they wish to do so.
- Before introducing a festival with which the adults on the group are not themselves familiar, appropriate advice and information will be sought.

Examples of parents involved in promoting cultural identity taken from the setting-questionnaire are:

Some parents come in to 'parties' – Eid, Christmas, Diwali etc. They bring different foods, wear a range of clothing styles, and talk many languages. Some will help plus join in 'dancing' e.g. with ras sticks at Navratri.

Positive images are expressed everywhere, children's personal work on the walls, on jigsaw puzzles, in photographs, self-portraits, and home-made books of the children. A huge pile of children's work, left behind from previous sessions, often to allow the paint to dry, will be distributed to parents at the end of term. They show many images and designs associated with the various cultures the children have touched on during this period, as well as a traditional range of animals and transport, seasonal and indefinable paintings!

Practitioners in this county town setting may have a less conventional background than some, including a Social Worker, English Christian teacher who lived in Pakistan as a child, and taught in Papua New Guinea, a State Enrolled Nurse with a childcare qualification, a Pakistani Bengali speaker, and a Hindu

who speaks Gujarati, Swahili and Urdu. It gives a strong and powerful mix of cultural experience, valuing language, background knowledge and understanding, and a commitment that all children will be respected and their individuality and potential recognised. Their enthusiasm is palpable.

Opportunities for updating cultural understanding in order to best support the identities of the children in their care come regularly for these practitioners. They have no doubt that this needs to be on-going. They attend a Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA) residential weekend course, annual multi-cultural events and workshops which have become a tradition in the town, that, although open to the community, are especially targeted at early years practitioners. A special project, supported by Social Services, provides two workers to visit settings to lead cooking sessions, sing, give information, and loan resources. The manager of this setting teaches PLA Diploma courses where equal opportunities and cultural identity are key elements. Questioned on any further training recommended for practitioners in the setting a parent spoken to said 'No – I think they are well trained. They know a lot'.

VII: Case study – Sessional setting: 22

This is not an intense, dull and boring place. Parents may be confronted with children's faces painted on the windows, or a display of little hand prints; there may be a paper plate wall - each one an individual face, or a group of children clap counting. Children 'in need' require high quality care, and the professionalism offered by this setting. Close to a busy arterial road and surrounded by houses it is a haven of tranquillity, much appreciated by the children and parents who use the facility.

In this case study I look at

- *the impression of positive images*
- *explicit developing of children's cultural identity*
- *the impact of researcher-introduced resources*
- *in-depth parental involvement*
- *looking for the gaps/ innovation*
- *well trained practitioners*

Catering for the whole community and clearly fulfilling its commitment to children in need and their families, the setting's user base is 50% white and 50% minority ethnic. This is overtly multi-cultural provision in a recognised inner city multi-cultural area, where 46% of the population is from minority ethnic groups. The practitioners are experienced, practical, knowledgeable, and approachable.

Inside the front door in a small waiting area parents are welcomed with a sign in many languages. Information stands and ethnically diverse posters give parents the opportunity to be aware of services available to them, while waiting for the door to be unlocked. Staff photographs help them to identify the different members as they wait for access. Safety of the children is uppermost in the practitioners' routine. Opening onto a long corridor in this purpose built building, surrounded by play areas, grass and trees, the children's group rooms are accessed on the right hand side, the offices, kitchens, laundry rooms, and stores to the left. The wide corridor itself is used as a resource with big ethnically diverse posters to brighten up the walls, attractive children's work to share with parents and boost self-esteem, photographs of the children in various activities, and a display stand of multi-cultural books.

The audit for the three group rooms reads like several pages of a multi-cultural resource catalogue; a culturally rich environment for a culturally diverse community. Parents and children are seen as individuals needing practical professional support, not a problem to be solved.

All children are unique individuals, so the activities we plan reflect equal opportunities for everyone. (Setting doc.)

The children were asked to bring in photographs of themselves from home. These were displayed on the wall, where the children were encouraged to look at and talk about what they saw. The named-practitioner told me 'the children were fascinated by them, studying them carefully, looking for long periods of time'. On one occasion skin toned paints were matched to each of the six children in the room. They were encouraged to paint themselves on the windows. The practitioner said all the children were recognisable without their names being attached, and much discussion ensued. Identification of faces is not always clear cut for little children. One parent brought in photographs of her child which, despite studying carefully, the child dismissed because 'he did not know anyone on them'. Sometimes children are embarrassed or unbelieving when they see a photograph of themselves in an unexpected location, and refuse to acknowledge it, as described by Shaffer (1994: 214)

... 3-5-year-olds are becoming increasingly aware of racial and ethnic differences, although these youngsters (particularly minority children) often fail to correctly identify the category to which they belong.

The researcher-introduced resources varied in their level of sophistication from simple slot-in figures in an inset-puzzle, to a face lotto game, to large cardboard cut-out figures in a variety of shapes, sizes, ethnicities and ages. When I arrived the inset-puzzle had already been put out on a table with indications it had been used, as not all the pieces were in place. A white girl came up and identified a black woman puzzle piece in African headdress and costume as her mum. Other children joined in the play. An Asian girl was competently placing the figures in the relevant space slots in the base-board. The named-practitioner referred to one of the figures and asked who it looks like. The child looked intently but did not answer. Asked about the woman in the sari she quickly responded 'mummy'. The girl was joined by another child who picked up individual figures taking them to other parts of the room and using them as free-standing characters. A three-year-old playing with the inset-puzzle pieces

identified two of the five figures by name as children he knew. That they had some similarity to these particular children was confirmed by his mother. From a very young age children look to recognise familiar people, even if as in this instance, they are depicted in unrealistic ways.

A second set of introduced-resources is the family cut-outs depicting three generations of four ethnic groups. The children took them to the doll's house, where an Asian girl identified an elderly white woman as the white practitioner's mummy. The figures were gradually moved and played with away from the house; an Asian boy was lying on the floor engrossed in his play with them. The named-practitioner encouraged the children to place the figures back in the house and identify family members. The practitioner and four children gathered around sorting the figures into families. Other children joined in and moved away, as their concentration or interest increased or diminished, leaving the one Asian girl who had been playing originally. She placed 'family' members around the table. The play continued with sorting and identifying, and placing figures around the house. Children gathered around and the named-practitioner asked if certain figures looked like someone they know. She pointed out the colour of the skin of the figures, while the children identify the clothes. A white child identified a black woman as her mummy. A black practitioner said 'no that looks like *my* mummy', but the child insisted it was her mummy. The children were called for a snack break. The Asian girl playing with the figures at the start of the observation twenty five minutes earlier was still playing with them. The practitioner said she had been playing with them since they were put out before the observation started.

(The setting) has an Equal Opportunities Policy and a copy will be made available to you. In line with this policy we aim to provide equal opportunities to all children and families using this service. We believe that every child should have good feelings about themselves. To achieve this staff (practitioners) will talk with the children about skin, hair, eye colour, gender and abilities. (setting doc.)

The setting's firmly grounded approach to equality is demonstrated by the experienced, well trained practitioners, who are committed to its promotion. This view is embodied in the following statements.

At the (setting) we believe that everybody is equal and that by sharing play experiences and activities and celebrating each others' cultures, we can learn to understand and respect difference. Our aim is to help children gain positive attitudes to race, ability, culture, language and gender. You will hear people speaking in languages other than English and similarly, hear stories, songs and rhymes being read to in other languages.

You will also find that there are some traditional songs and stories which we do not use. This is because these give discriminatory messages, or stereotype people into certain roles. (setting doc.)

The practitioners, of varied ethnic backgrounds, speak a number of different languages between them which helps with communication with children and parents. At story time the children listened intently as 'Gail's Birthday Party' book was read to the children in two languages. During the activity sessions there was not much language used by the children, they often communicated by occasional words and body language. Singing and rhymes observed are traditionally English, like Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, and Wind The Bobbin, also a nursery song tape playing at one point, which the children were joining in enthusiastically. A lot of praise and encouragement was given by the practitioners, who gave respect to the children by frequently using their names.

Practitioners are conscious of the need to develop cultural identity. In relaying the story of her 'cultural journey' the named-practitioner described her white working class background and the impact this has had on her personal and social development. 'When doing home visits we always tell the parents we are a multi-cultural centre. We encourage them to participate, and value all cultures' she added. The setting-questionnaire gave examples of practice in the setting that helped the development of cultural identity. This included staff training,

identity work with the children, carers of dual heritage children group, multi-cultural food, and celebration of all main festivals.

New and innovative ways are explored by the setting in order to better support the parents. One such venture, that had been recorded on the setting-questionnaire (see above) and referred to by the named-practitioner, was reported in Community Care magazine:

One area in which Leicester has started to 'do it' (*racial equality and cohesion*) is in working with its growing dual heritage population. Often dual heritage children are brought up as black or white reflecting the stronger parent's influence, and miss out on one perspective. There is little recognition of their needs or role in society.

... for years there have been a lot of dual heritage children being referred, who are usually cared for by a single, white mother ... so the idea was to get a support group together so parents could meet, share ideas, talk about experiences and to see if there were any common difficulties

(Hopkins 2002: 42)

Working with parents is an integral aspect of this setting, and they are included at several levels. They are encouraged to stay with their children during the settling-in process when a child first starts or following a traumatic event, they are invited to discuss issues on an individual basis with the practitioners, to attend talks, parent groups, drop-in sessions, children's activities, special events and festivals, and receive a regular parental newsletter. The setting documentation states that groups include 'managing children's behaviour, child development and other topics which inform and help to build self-esteem'.

We have an Asian parents group, with speakers, and they go on outings. Advice is given, they are informed about benefits, and health promotion. We book an interpreter ...

(practitioner)

Four parents submitted parental questionnaires for the research, and two were interviewed briefly by the researcher as they collected their children from the setting. Generally they were positive about the setting's approach to a range of

cultures and the development of their child's cultural identity, and the listening ear they gave 'In this (setting) you can talk to staff – staff listen'. Comments made were 'good idea, there should be more information about things like that, (children) should know how other people live' and 'its good to gain knowledge and appreciate others cultures'.

Parents are fully informed about the ethos of the setting and the expectation placed on them by the practitioners. Part of the setting documentation given to the parents states:

Throughout the year we celebrate festivals from different cultures. This involves activities such as art work, singing and dancing etc. You will be informed when these are taking place so that you can share the experience with your child. You have the option to ask that your child does not participate.

All the practitioners in the setting are qualified to a Level 3 (therefore: trained to work in a childcare setting without close supervision) and 'have a variety of skills and knowledge, with experience of child development and play' (Setting doc.). The practitioners also have an impressive record of continuing professional development (CPD) as cited on the setting questionnaire.

The Continuing Professional Development of the practitioners includes training in:

Race awareness	Assertiveness for black women	Black workers in white organizations
Working with black children and their families	Anti-oppressive practice	Cultural awareness
Tackling Harassment	Race equality and anti-discriminatory practice issues	White managers of black staff

A recent report from the Daycare Trust (2008), which follows on from earlier work with Black Minority Ethnic (BME) parents, states 'many parents expressed a preference for childcare workers of the same ethnicity as them, the majority

prioritised having workers who understood their culture and they could communicate with'. The report goes on to cite a key finding as: 'the need to recognise diversity, including regular training of staff around cultural awareness'. This setting would appear to fulfil the requirements of this report, in its ethnic, cultural and linguistic mix of practitioners, and the regular ongoing training required to maintain that stance.

The final pages of the Daycare Trust report (2008: 13-14) gives conclusions and recommendations, two of which have been extracted below.

In line with requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 for local authorities to support childcare workers working in areas of ethnic diversity, in order to ensure that every childcare setting is culturally appropriate and sensitive to all families: *(they should)*

- Make base-line training in race equality and race/ cultural awareness compulsory for all childcare training courses for all staff, and making it free of charge to settings as required
- Make courses in languages available free of charge to settings as required (Daycare Trust 2008a:14)

This setting could be an example to others to fulfill these requirements, although they would not claim to have all the answers. One issue the named-practitioner and her colleagues have yet to fully understand is the cultural differences towards discipline, and cultural expectations of behaviour management. Good practice is demanding and practitioners have to be committed to personal development and adaptable to current thinking.

Summary of chapter and into the next

Researching these settings was illuminating in several ways. All was not as predicted; there were surprises and disappointments, different ways of looking at the situation, positive actions and gaps in presentation. Overall the experience was stimulating, much good practice was demonstrated, children were well cared for by committed practitioners, and the provision, while in places in need of development, is something the settings can be proud of.

In the next chapter the findings are identified within the context of all 25 settings, including the in-depth research in the seven case studies reported in this chapter, with practitioner contributions, parental input, views on training, the cultural environment and, what I define as, the iconic symbols of multiculturalism.

CHAPTER 5 –RESEARCH FINDINGS (2)

We learn more by looking for the answer to a question and not finding it than we do from learning the answer itself.

Lloyd Alexander, Writer (1924 – 2007)

Data is always as good as far as it goes, and there is always more data to keep correcting the categories with more relevant properties.

Glaser (2002: 1)

Introduction

The research examined the development of cultural identity in early years' settings from the perception of practitioners, parents, and my own observations. The presentation of the data, viewed through my interpretive lens, has been organised under the following headings to address the research questions:

1. Research Question

What do practitioners and parents identify as specific factors in the cultural environment of the early years setting which support the development of cultural identity of young children?

- Context. Here the effect of selective variables as to whether the settings were full-time or sessional, their location, the ethnic composition of the setting, the impact of the 'cultural environment' in the setting, and faith and diversity are considered. The seven settings visited for in-depth research have been discussed in detail in the previous chapter.
- Parents. Here I consider parental involvement in the setting, their interest, understanding and awareness of cultural diversity, their knowledge of practice within the setting, and parent/practitioner communication.

2. Research Question. How do the values and ethos of practitioners in early years' settings impact in the formation of the cultural identity of young children?

- Practitioners. In this section I look at attitude, understanding, ethnicity, differing professional practice, involvement with parents, and the potential effects of the researcher on practitioners. The unstructured interview with

the named-practitioners in the seven settings visited, recording their personal 'cultural journey' will be referenced here.

- Training. Three aspects are considered here, training already undertaken, suggestions from practitioners for continuing professional development, and comments from parents related to parental and practitioner training.

3. Research Question. What aspects of the cultural environment in early years setting are conducive to the positive development of cultural identity in young children?

- Communication and involvement with children and parents. Communication is the key to quality care; between children and practitioners, practitioners and children, practitioners and parents, and practitioner to practitioner.
- Icons of multi-culturalism. Here I examine what I term the 'iconic' resources associated with good practice when addressing cultural diversity including festivals, ethnically diverse dolls, books, and dressing up and imaginative play.
- Using researcher-introduced resources. An examination of how researcher-introduced resources were presented by practitioners and how children used them.

Context.

Taking part in the research were twenty five settings, seven full-day care settings and eighteen sessional/community groups (preschool, education nursery, crèche, and parent/carers and toddler groups) where practitioners work with the children. Sixteen settings were in urban locations: nine in the inner city – two full-day care and seven sessional – and seven more sessional settings in the outer city. In county locations were nine settings, five of which were full-day care and four sessional.

Contact identification number	Type of setting	Location
1	Full-day care Case study 18	Inner city
2	Full-day care Case study 6	County town
4	Sessional	Outer city
6	Sessional Case study 9	Inner city
7	Sessional	Outer city
8	Full-day care	County
9	Sessional	County
10	Full-day care	County
11	Sessional Case study 13	Inner city
13	Full-day Case study 4	Inner city
15	Sessional	Outer city
17	Sessional	Inner city
18	Sessional	Inner city
19	Sessional	Outer city
20	Sessional	Inner city
21	Sessional	County
22	Sessional Case study 19	County town
23	Sessional	Outer city
24	Sessional	Inner city
25	Full-day	County town
26	Sessional	Inner city
27	Full-day	County town
29	Sessional Case study 22	Inner city
31	Sessional	City wide
32	Sessional	Outer city

Table 10:- Type of provision and location of settings

Ethnic composition of the settings

There are huge variables of ethnicity of both children and practitioners over the range of settings; definitions having been given by the practitioners on the setting questionnaire. Precise details relating to numbers of practitioners or ethnicity of

the person in charge were not asked for, and four settings omitted to answer the question. The findings show in the inner city, seven settings (78%) have multi-ethnic practitioners; one has all white practitioners and one not stated (although this setting was visited by the researcher and was seen to have an ethnically diverse team). In the wider city boundaries, four are multi-ethnic (57%), one all white, and two are not stated. Of the nine county settings, five are all white practitioners (56%), three have a multi-ethnic team, and one did not respond. Within the inner and outer city there are multi-ethnic practitioners in 87% of settings. Overall, 74% of settings across the city and county submitting the ethnic make-up of practitioners are ethnically diverse. Evidence from this research would suggest settings value the contribution of multi-ethnic practitioners and achieve a high level of success in recruiting them to this role.

Examining the ethnic make-up of the children shows that one third of settings have more than 50% of children from minority ethnic communities and these are all located in the inner city area. Three of these settings (9, 16, 20) have 100% of children from minority ethnic communities, although only one of these has 100% minority ethnic practitioners (20).

In the seven settings selected for more in-depth research a visual audit of the setting was carried out on the first visit. Five of these are in purpose built or adapted permanent accommodation, four full-time settings (4,18,22, in the inner city, setting 6 in the county) and one sessional setting (13) inner city. Two sessional settings are in shared community halls (19 county, 9 inner city).

Equal opportunities policy

Some, but not all, settings in the research have an equal opportunities policy. Of the 25 settings contributing to the research 12 did not respond to this question at all. Eleven responded positively, eight providing copies/ information which related to culture. One declared they do not have a policy 'specifically about cultural development, but that it is a thread which runs through our policies' (setting 8). Two said they do not have an equal opportunities policy (settings 16, 25). Most examples supplied give positive and thoughtful statements, and as each one is different this would indicate they are unique to the setting.

A selection of statements includes:

- The (corporate reference) has produced audio-tapes in English, Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi and Urdu for people who have difficulty reading English. *(This is in relation to policies, procedures and practices of the settings.)*
(doc. setting 22)
- Our aim is to show respectful awareness of all the major events in the lives of children and families in the group and in our society as a whole, and to welcome the diversity of backgrounds from which they come.
(doc. setting 19)
- We believe in the individuality of all persons, regardless of their background, and a conscious effort will be made by all staff to develop positive self identity for all children in (the setting), and to promote the encouragement and support of those children to value and respect all cultures and racial groups.
(doc. setting 6)
- The culture, religion and race of a child must be taken into consideration and due respect should be given to their beliefs and traditions at all times.
(doc. setting 9)
- Multi-cultural play must be an integral part of activities and equipment ...
(doc. setting 9)
- Activities and work programmes are geared towards the development and promotion of intercultural learning and understanding, confidence building, increased knowledge and empowerment, cultural awareness, self concept and identity.
(doc. setting 21)
- Resources will be chosen to give children a balanced view of the world and an appreciation of the rich diversity of our multi-racial society.
(doc. setting 19)
- As each child is unique they will be treated as individuals, regardless of their gender, race, religion, culture or special needs. Children will be educated about religions and cultures other than their own and this will be reflected around the (setting) at all times.
(doc. setting 15)
- The (setting) staff respect the children's family background, race, culture, religion and language, giving them a sense of their own personal value and teaching them to value others'.
(doc. setting 8)

One county town full-day care provision (setting 3), provided a sixteen page parent pack described on the first page as a 'Policy Document' which contained an equal opportunity policy, consisting of only three points . This latter began:

The (setting) is firmly committed to the implementation of the following Equal Opportunities Policy, relating to race, gender, ability or sexual orientation.

1. The atmosphere and physical environment of the (setting) will ensure that equal value is given to everyone regardless of gender, race, ability or sexual orientation.

Point two refers to access to the setting, and point three refers to unlawful discrimination against employees or children. Details of how the above statements will be monitored and reviewed follows including 'A statistical analysis will be made of ethnic origin, gender ... compared with information available relating to the local population'. There is only one half-reference in the whole document to culture and this is contained in the section on 'Outings' which says 'we try to have day outings from time to time. For example theatre, farms, multi-cultured (sic) centres etc'. This setting has 95% white children and all white practitioners, which reflects a largely all white local population. This was not, however, typical of the county settings in this research as four positive documents were received from them (settings 6, 8, 15, which are largely all white areas, and 19), and three from inner city settings (settings 9, 21, 22).

The first research question relates to practitioners understanding about culture/ cultural identity and how they identify this in the setting. Multi-ethnic practitioners, representative of the catchment population, would indicate an awareness of the need for cultural representation. Equal Opportunity policies are important documents in stating the salient points the setting values, although many (almost 50%) of the settings did not deem them important enough to indicate if they had one or not.

Research Question 1

What do practitioners and parents identify as specific factors in the cultural environment of the early years setting which support the development of cultural identity of young children?

The cultural environment of the setting

The first aspect of data gathering in each of the seven settings was a visual impact audit. This was a walk through the premises in all of the seven selected settings concentrating on the visual impact related to cultural diversity as would be perceived by parents and children. My focus was on displays and notices, the resources visible in the setting, and the ethnic diversity of the practitioners. There was ethnic diversity of practitioners in five of the settings (inner city settings 9, 13, 18, 22, county 19); in two settings practitioners were all white (setting 4, 6) surprisingly one of which is in the inner city (setting 4). Setting 9 has fewer resources due to three factors; it is a newly opened refurbished facility, much of the equipment has to be packed away at the end of the session, and the young age of children. As described in the case study (Chapter 4) this is a transient population with 100% of the children from diverse minority ethnic communities, for the majority of these children, English is an additional language. Taking this into account, all settings demonstrated a rich culturally reflective environment.

The cultural range in settings

Contrasting findings are recorded on the questionnaires of two community groups participating in the research (inner city setting 20 and county setting 25). Setting 20 had 100% minority ethnic staff – Hindu and Sikh, paid or unpaid, with a Sikh leader, and 100% minority ethnic children (over the previous two years these were identified as Asian, Pakistani, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh). The other setting (25), led by a white, English, Christian and 100% white, English, Christian paid or unpaid practitioners, stated that they had a current balance of 99.9% white children. Over the two years prior to the research this setting indicated that children had attended, whose ethnicity and religion had been defined by the

parents, as black, African, white, English, Scottish, Asian, Indian, Hindu and Christian. Each setting was asked by the researcher to complete the matrix, on the setting questionnaire, identifying the range of activities/ resources offered in the setting that reflected a multicultural environment. The Christian group (setting 25) identified only one item, out a possible 47, which is images (posters, pictures). The Asian group (setting 20) identified 42 activities/ resources from the list and added a further five in the blank spaces.

The setting (20) with 100% staff and children from minority ethnic groups has an equal opportunities policy, the white Christian group (setting 25) answered no to that question. Neither group had received any training in cultural identity in the early years; the first setting indicated they would like to receive such training, the latter did not want to. When asked to indicate why they did not want training the white setting (25) said 'it is not appropriate to our purpose as a group'.

While, obviously, this is a very small sample and, were it larger extremes like this may well be disregarded, it is interesting to note the correlation between the ethnic representation of the practitioners and multicultural resources identified by the setting. Future researchers could select greater numbers of settings to question these two extremes of practitioner representation and the resulting knowledge, understanding and quality of the provision.

A second sessional setting (10), in the city but only 2 miles from the one described above (setting 25), with 100% white practitioners and 99% white children, identified 31 reflections of a multicultural environment out of a potential 47. This was a useful comparator with the sessional setting (25) described above. Practitioners here had received training in cultural identity in the early years, equal opportunity training, and are due to attend a course entitled 'Persona dolls: tackling equality issues in the early years'.

One full-day care setting (6) located in the county, had 100%, ethnically white practitioners and children and on the setting questionnaire matrix recorded twenty nine opportunities to reflect the multicultural environment. They too had not received training on cultural identity but expressed a desire to do so. This setting felt that they needed to know how to involve parents, wanted to share experiences, to liaise with other groups, and have workshops with staff and parents. Another full-day care setting (8) have 99% white children and 100% white practitioners. They recorded thirty five opportunities to reflect the multicultural environment out of a potential forty seven. They too desired further training.

Two additional sessional settings (9, 16) in the inner city have 100% and one (7) 99% minority ethnic children, although not practitioners.

Promoting knowledge of a range of cultures

Question five on the setting questionnaire asked 'If there is a predominance of one culture in your setting what are your views on promoting knowledge of a wide range of cultures?'. Twenty three settings answered this question positively, two did not respond and one just put 'no' (setting 11). The Asian setting (20) referred to above responded with 'we promote other cultures because children will move on to other settings, with these will be a wide range of people from other cultures'. The white sessional setting (25) said 'I do not think it is the purpose of our group to do this'. In contrast the response to this question given by one all white full-day care setting (6) is that the 'staff team (are) aware of the importance of promoting a wide range of cultures and fully willing to do so'. The second largely all white setting (8) in response to this question said 'ignorance brings fear and intolerance – children should have opportunities to enjoy and understand a wide variety of cultures' Generally the faith or ethnicity of the team of practitioners did not impact on provision.

Parental involvement in the settings

Parents were asked on the questionnaire if they were involved in their child's setting, and if so in what way. For some settings, e.g. some sessional playgroups, parental involvement is an expected part of the process, for others parents need to leave their children in the care of practitioners and go to work. Suggestions were given in question one 'could include being a parent helper, a committee member, spending time in the group for celebrations or particular activities, cooking, crafts etc, any other areas'. Twenty percent of parents responded positively; those responses coming from twelve (48%) of the twenty-five settings, although involvement appeared to be minimal. Of these four were full day care, and eight sessional community groups – playgroups and crèches.

Seven full-day care settings and eighteen sessional settings took part in the research, so proportions of parental involvement were maintained between the types of settings. Of the thirty three parents involved, seven, possibly nine (information given was not clear) are parent helpers, ten are on management committees, six are occasional supporters for festivals, trips, providing objects and ideas, and eight did not state what their involvement was. Nor was the stated type of involvement significantly different, although there were more parents from sessional groups who did not state what their involvement was, this is likely to have been more active. There are a number of reasons why involvement is limited, some expressing this on the questionnaire. Reasons included; caring for younger children, working full-time, and having a business to run. Eight parents from the full-time provision and ten parents from the sessional provision, who were not currently involved, expressed a desire to be so.

One parent said:

They could involve parents more, or even ask parents to bring things in on a festival or something so children can see what it is, and so on.

(parent 8:setting 13)

Parents who spoke to the researcher discussed their influence on developing the cultural identity of their children by bringing things into the setting, including dressing up clothes and photographs. They felt that by choosing a particular setting, meeting other parents and being aware of what was going on also contributed.

One setting encouraging parents to become involved has a website with the following statement on:

Many festivals, such as Diwali, Eid, Christmas, Chinese New Year and Easter are celebrated. We welcome the generous help offered by parents with the particular details and cultures concerning these festivals.

(website of full-day care setting 4)

Three parents from this setting (4) submitting questionnaires for this research, confirm that one is on the management committee of the setting, one is a parent helper, and one helps with projects in the setting. There are other ways parents felt they could contribute to the settings, a number suggested involving themselves in training with practitioners, see later section.

As a professional researcher assessing the comments by parents I am aware of the constraints placed on parents in being actively involved in their child's setting. Many would like to be involved, practitioners would welcome it, but other factors prevent more than a nominal involvement. There does not seem to be an easy answer to this dilemma. Without knowing what is actually happening in the setting parents may well be basing their comments on wider societal views.

Parental interest, understanding and awareness of cultural diversity

Not all 75 parents completing the parental questionnaire chose to identify their ethnicity or religion. Sixty-six did respond and of these, half stated to be white and/ or English; seventeen parents were Christians, sixteen followed no religion, ten were Hindu, six were Muslim and four Sikh. The chosen method of identification, following the Census classification, annoyed one parent who stated

'none (don't like little boxes)' and 'no religion – implies the existence of a god!!' (parent: 47: setting 13), this same parent objected to some of the terminology 'the choice of words in the questionnaire were sometimes provocative i.e. such as 'Pagan', 'childrearing' (sounds like raising animals), 'family roles' (what is a family)', although the responses were left to the parent to self-define, and another who posed a question as well as a response 'Scandinavian/ British/ Asian/ African/ Muslim. Are you asking about colour, or country of birth, or continent of birth, or cultural background, or cultural identity through living in a place, or religion? All are represented above. We do not all fit neatly in to boxes!' (parent 60: setting18). This demonstrates the difficulty of defining identity and its interpretation. This particular parent believes he/she is influencing the development of cultural identity of her/his own children in the setting in the following ways:

Being a white Scandinavian Muslim I do not fit into what people and children might perceive as the stereotypical Muslim. I try to give children in the (setting) a positive view of people from different backgrounds. (parent 60: setting 18)

The majority of parents (69%) when asked their views on promoting knowledge and understanding from a range of cultures in the setting gave a positive response.

I feel this type of cultural development is a necessity for children today and hopefully it may stop some racism or ignorance before it starts by giving children more knowledge (parent 44: setting 12)

We are a small world now – by promoting understanding of different cultures we promote respect for other cultures for both children and parents (parent 57: setting 16)

A few, having made positive comments, countered this with reservations by saying that while they thought knowledge and understanding of a range of cultures was very important that 'children ... under 5 ... will get confused' (Asian Muslim parent 74: setting 22), and 'our own cultural identity is played down and not taught now', and 'good idea in principle but never really happens' (White parent 40, no religion setting 12).

On the parental questionnaire (Question 4) parents were requested to express their views on 'promoting knowledge and understanding in the setting from a range of cultures'. Sixty-six responses were received out of a maximum of seventy-five questionnaires from nineteen settings. The majority (92%) were positive, with the value of awareness being consistently high, and several of the comments made direct reference to the 'multicultural society' we live in. Of the remainder only one response is totally negative 'keep the cultures separate. Don't try ramming religion down their throats' from a white English parent (72: setting 22) who professed to have 'no religion'. Concern is expressed of a fear of losing the Christian identity, and a forthright statement that we 'always end up pandering to foreign cultures at the expense of our own' (parent 40: setting 12). Three respondents perhaps were less aware of what the practitioners were trying to achieve when they made the comments 'I do not think they (the children) need to know about other cultures' (parent 41: setting 12), 'children under 5 should not be given too much information they will get confused' (parent 74: setting 22) and 'my main aim is for my child to play ... where culture etc. does not matter' (parent 41: setting 12). Some confusion appears to exist with some parents, and reservations from some settings (10) 'how do you promote a white English identity?'. Culture is so close that it is not always identified and is a matter of awareness and interpretation.

It's not something I give a great deal of thought to being white, English and living in England.
(parent 24: setting 8)

I believe this statement, as described in the literature review, will apply to many respondents to this research because they see cultural identity as a nebulous concept which is just taken for granted. As a researcher with an interpretive approach I am able to identify the aspects which I feel are connected with cultural identity in young children and tease out the significant factors affecting the child's development.

Parents knowledge of practice within the setting

The research suggests that many parents are not fully aware of how their child is learning and developing in the setting. The questionnaire asked them, among other things, to indicate how the practitioners helped their child to develop their cultural identity and to give examples. Twenty-five percent of parents were unable to answer that question, mostly by leaving it blank with one don't know, and one N/A. A great many more recorded very little. Parents are positive about the need for cultural awareness, but not so as to how this happens in their setting to help their child develop their cultural identity. Of those giving a response, a majority cited festivals and celebrations, with several references to food. Some of the positive reasons parents chose for particular settings are:

One reason for sending my child to this group ... , I also wanted an environment that provided opportunities for my daughter to learn more about other cultures and religions that many other groups do not provide. Activities to cater for this i.e. festivals and important dates in the history of ...

(doc. parent: setting 19)

To give our child direct experience of a broad range of the cultural and societal landscape.

(doc. parent: setting 19)

I love the cross-cultural nature of the group. The festivals are great, my kids and I love attending.

(doc. parent: setting 19)

All persons entering the setting have an influence on the development of children's cultural identity – through discussion, example, projects and activities, storytelling, cookery, the celebration of events, and just being there.

(parent 27: setting 8)

An indication of the lack of parental awareness came in the response, or rather lack of response, to the question on the questionnaire regarding suggestions for further training of practitioners. Despite most of the parents answering the rest of the questions, 19 (25%) left this section blank; two said 'don't know', one 'not sure', one 'not aware of what is available', plus the quotation below.

We are not aware of their current level of training and feel unable to comment. We do not see the practitioners during structured sessions
(parent 52: setting 14)

This would take the score to 32% of parents who do not know sufficiently how the setting operates to know if further training is required. This is not surprising as the professional practitioners are providing a service for them, and many will be happy to leave the children in their care. It does, however, give the setting an opportunity to involve the parents, which some would indicate they would like to do.

Parental comments/ suggestions related to practitioner training

The comments from parents followed three broad strands 1) supporting ongoing training for practitioners, 2) linking training to themselves, and 3) certain reservations. Forty-four percent of parents felt able to comment on these issues. Many useful suggestions were made for informal and local training, and were generally thoughtful rather than critical.

The practitioners seem fairly knowledgeable already – I think it helps that the practitioners themselves have a variety of cultural backgrounds.
(parent 50: white English no religion: setting 14)

Practitioners will be informed for their personal as well as professional development.
(parent 71: Black African Christian: setting 21)

Maybe have packs on different cultures i.e. Jewish, candles, food they eat and how they celebrate. Greek – and Turkish – foods, costume
(parent 22: Indian Hindu: setting 7)

On a number of occasions parents made reference to themselves as potential supports for imparting information.

Have training sessions and talk to parents from different backgrounds, for information on cultures
(parent 31: Indian Hindu: setting 9)

To ask parents of any 'minor' words which would be helpful ... i.e. words in Greek – yes/ no/ please etc. to aid understanding and communication
(parent 46: white Greek: setting 12)

Mainly through discussions with and the co-operation of the parents
(parent 55: white Irish/Polish Catholic: setting 15)

Everybody can learn more, there's always going to be something we don't know and if the practitioners are more culturally aware they will pass this on to the children as well as from the parents
(parent 44: white no religion: setting 12)

A few parents questioned the knowledge, or presentation, of culture within the setting.

I feel they know more about Asian cultures than they do about the UK.
(parent 8: white Scottish/ English: setting 4)

Practitioners have a good knowledge of other cultures and children participate in lots of activities. However I am not sure that the child's own culture is explored in the same way.
(parent 18: white English Christian: setting 6)

Practitioners from ethnic minority backgrounds are usually under the impression that they do not need training on cultural identity issues. This is untrue and needs to be addressed.
(parent 57: Indian Hindu/ British Asian: setting 16)

No – at this age culture shouldn't be emphasised too much
(parent 74: Asian Muslim: setting 22)

Again emerging data suggest parents willing to be involved in the setting through supporting the practitioners knowledge and training, while at the same time looking at culture through the perspective of 'other cultures' and not recognising the huge part indigenous culture plays. I can identify this through my experience, knowledge, and reading and am able to stand back and identify where other perspectives are being instigated.

Practitioners.

Practitioners play a pivotal role in how a setting achieves quality provision and an understanding of how the development of cultural identity is influenced within the setting. The next section raises the issue in the second research question:

Research Question 2. How do the values and ethos of practitioners in early years' settings impact in the formation of the cultural identity of young children?

Ethnicity

As described above there are high levels of multi-ethnic practitioners working in the settings covered by the research. Parents make few references to the ethnicity of the practitioners, and what is said is positive 'I think it helps that the staff themselves have a variety of cultural backgrounds' (parent 50: setting 14) and

The staff (at the setting) are themselves drawn from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Some teachers are Muslim and wear a head scarf, and there is a male Sikh teacher. It teaches the children to be happy with who they are and to appreciate different cultures (parent 60: setting 18)

Not everyone is comfortable with the social convention which requires us to 'tick boxes' relating to ethnicity and religion. Some choose to ignore the questions, others make statements:

I am Black but in your eyes I am African Caribbean. Unfortunately in my views there is no such word. Caribbean is the West Indies, African is Africa. Not all Africans like to be associated with Black/ Caribbean people as we are different in culture, features and characteristic trait.
(practitioner: setting 2)

However, without this facility it is impossible to monitor practitioners or children to ensure appropriate action is taken to redress any imbalances i.e. ethnic/ cultural diversity to represent the local population. The case studies show how the ethnic composition of the setting, and the attitude of the practitioners, affect the ethos of the provision.

Attitude and good practice

I believe a positive attitude in practitioners towards cultural diversity is of paramount importance for good practice. Value is placed on responsive practitioners as one parent said to the researcher approvingly 'staff respect parents' views' (setting 22). An open mind is required of practitioners to welcome information and involve the experts, the parents. 'We are always interested to listen to parents who want to talk to us about their culture' (setting

11). Examples of good practice and positive attitudes:

The physical environment, staff and operational materials reflect positive attitudes to cultural development and appreciation of the principle of diversity. (setting 21)

Parents ... discuss family values (with us) (setting 24)

...our children come from many different backgrounds, they celebrate a wide variety of festivals throughout the year, they enjoy different foods, they speak different languages and sometimes they dress differently. We think it is important to recognise these differences and value them so that we can all learn from each other, share food, enjoy the parties! As the French say ... 'Vive la difference!' (doc. setting 19)

At one setting (18) the notice-board shows a calendar of festivals from all the main religions. Practitioners described how a different festival is celebrated each month. They feel 'lucky to have representatives from different backgrounds – Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Sikh'. They described how they had taken all the children aged 2 – 5 years to Belgrave Road Leicester to see the Diwali lights. They went into an Asian sweet shop, showed the children the sweets, and took a box home to share with the parents.

There are many ways to demonstrate good practice, and this can be a 'show' for the researcher. However the skills I have developed as a practitioner and research lead me to believe good practice can only consistently be observed when practitioners have the right attitude towards children, parents and the cultural environment of the setting. For example when I visited two settings (18, 22) the children were drawing self-portraits with skin-tone pencils, in another (4) they were making a dragon card for Chinese New Year, in a fourth (6) the children were given brushes, clothes and ethnically diverse dolls to tend, and a fifth (19) were making simplified (individualistic!) Javanese shadow puppets. Any of these activities could have been offered on that particular day because they were expecting me. In observing the children I could see they were comfortable in undertaking the activity, they demonstrated they were used to doing this sort of activity, and the practitioners were relaxed in presenting or supporting the

activity. There was also plenty of evidence in the setting to show this was not unusual – wall displays, children’s individual files with completed paintings/drawings in, or a stack of drawings ready to go home. Direct observations in the setting (4) showed active promotion of Chinese New Year in displays, books, craft activities, and talking about it. This setting had a comprehensive resource file of festivals and multicultural activities to be called on at the appropriate time. (Further details described in the previous chapter – Case study setting 4). I visited each of the seven settings several times, the one activity I saw on the first day was not repeated, and other activities took their place.

A number of the Equal Opportunity Policies described in this chapter give examples of positive values of the setting. Staff are being given the lead to be conscientious in their approach, to be sensitive to the needs of the parents and children, to make them feel welcome, to treat as individuals, to give value and respect to all cultures, and teaching the children to value others.

Training.

The questionnaire asked of the twenty five settings if the practitioners had received any training on cultural identity in the early years. Seven settings not visited (1, 5, 10, 11, 21, 23, 24) plus three of the seven visited for in-depth research (4, 19, 22) answered positively. Three had taken Pre-school Learning Alliance courses (settings 1, 19, 24) and one had addressed the subject on Nursery Nurse training (setting 4), four had attended locally presented sessions (settings 10, 11, 22, 23) and one handles it in-house (setting 21).

Suggested components for ‘future training which would be helpful to them in the development of cultural identity in their setting’ included ‘less well known religions’ (setting 7), ‘how to promote cultural identity in a non-tokenistic way’ (setting 8), ‘Ideas and activities to develop cultural identity’ (setting 20), ‘how to **do** identity’, ‘positive role models’, ‘involving parents’, and ‘resources’ (all from

setting 17), 'in depth information on food/ festivals/ beliefs/ and gods' (setting15) 'practical ideas' (setting 2) and 'teaching cultural identity without making it an issue' (setting 12).

Practitioners are particularly responsive to the community around the setting. In one multicultural inner city area setting (9), with many and diverse populations, they are anxious to understand the different cultural practices and views to be better able to support families and care for the children. Although a multi-cultural, multi-faith, multi-lingual team they feel they require Swahili classes to learn basic words like toilet, biscuit, and drink. Practitioners feel strongly that communicating with parents on cultural awareness is more effective than calling in professionals. In addition to cultures and customs with which the team are familiar they have children of Somali, Moroccan, and Dutch parents, cultures of which they are less familiar. They want answers to questions like what they do and why, do boys go to the table before girls, or how they feel about having girl babies before boys. Using this as awareness training the practitioners feel they themselves benefit, and parents are pleased to be asked and it makes them feel more part of the group.

Differently structured and located settings will have differing views on training requirements. Multicultural inner city settings, with diverse staff may have instant access to information, while others will have to seek it out. The necessity is to be aware of the need to be well informed and to gain that knowledge through the most appropriate means.

Communication and involvement with children and parents

Professional practice, and an understanding of the processes involved,, and how that is undertaken is what makes some settings stand out over and above others. This leads us to the third research question:

3. Research Question. What aspects of the cultural environment in early years setting are conducive to the positive development of cultural identity in young children?

The nature of communication and involvement varied from setting to setting, although in all instances observed it was at a high level. A total of ninety six direct participant observations were made in the seven settings, and on ninety-four occasions there was considerable communication between children and practitioners and practitioners and children. Conversely, on only sixteen occasions were there conversations between practitioners. Practitioner diaries recorded forty-nine entries, forty-five of which stated communication between children and practitioners and practitioners and children, and thirty practitioner to practitioner communications. There were no anomalies between the settings which would indicate they were all operating at a high level, although there appeared to be a higher level of practitioner to practitioner communication when the researcher was not present, indicating one of the affects a researcher has on practice. Examples which follow were taken from participant observations in each of the seven settings.

The children were sitting at a table, with a practitioner, a mirror and drawing materials. There was a lively conversation and good communication between adult and children. 'Look in the mirror and see what colour your skin is. Is it brown or white?' the practitioner asked while showing the child the range of pencil colour choices, one at a time (Further details described in the previous chapter – Case study setting 18).

I observed a Bengali speaking practitioner, committed to all children learning more than one language from an early age, telling Bengali and non-Bengali speaking children stories in the book corner ((Further details described in the previous chapter – Case study setting 19). Children exposed to different languages are more likely to gain a positive attitude to those who speak them than if they are seen as 'strange' or a 'problem'. Brown (2001: 67) sees the mono-lingual stance as unproductive against the multi-lingual environment.

To counter the possibility of fluent English speakers adopting superior attitudes towards children who are less fluent than they are, practitioners need to provide a multi-lingual environment that encourages all the children to know about respect the full range of languages and the people who speak them. Stories and discussions that acknowledge and praise children clever enough to speak more than one language can have a positive effect.

Prior to lunch, after hand washing, each child responded to their name and collected a knife, fork and spoon in a beaker and sat at the table chatting with their peers. The practitioner was moving around, talking to the children, giving instruction and making enquiries, pouring water into the beakers and checking which hand holds the knife and fork. On another occasion I observed lunch-time in the setting ((Further details described in the previous chapter – Case study 4) with the practitioner sitting at the table with the children having wide-ranging discussions about countries and cities, country of origin, shape of earrings, addresses and numbers.

On my earlier visit to the setting ((Further details described in the previous chapter – Case study 9) with very young, mainly non-English speaking children in a newly re-opened facility, I observed quiet non-verbal bewildered children. Five days later on my next visit I found a much more settled group. Children were starting to interact with one another and speak to the practitioners. The children were busy and happy in setting 13(Further details described in the previous chapter – Case study setting 13), the noise levels were low, and practitioners were moving around the room from activity to activity. Some were spending longer periods at one activity participating, encouraging, talking, negotiating, and developing play.

The children were looking at pictures of people with the practitioner (Further details described in the previous chapter – Case study setting 22) initiating discussion, such as ‘What can you tell me about this lady?’. The children pointed out details, constructed a scenario around the figure, and discussed issues with practitioner contribution (Further details described in the previous chapter – Case study setting 6). The practitioner initiated a discussion on hair and eye colour and suggested that the children put their own colours on the

paper. They enthusiastically identified each other's colours, including the practitioner. She then demonstrated by drawing a picture of herself, with the children identifying the correct colours. She had white skin, one green eye and one brown eye, pink lips and brown hair. They then did a self-portrait.

I could see the intensity of the conversations and communication, how comfortable and familiar the children were with this attention. I interpreted this to indicate that I, as a researcher, was having a minimal affect on the actions of both practitioners and children and that cultural and ethnic differences were part of the regular discussion in these settings. Although I am sure culturally diverse resources were not brought in especially, I wondered how often and in what context. In one setting (Further details described in the previous chapter – Case study setting 6) one table was set out with dressed ethnically diverse dolls and hairbrushes, and multi-cultural play-food in others. I question whether this an example of the 'Hawthorne Effect' of the presence of the researcher affecting the behaviour of the researched?

Communication with parents occurs in different ways. Notice-boards are a regular way of posting information, menus, timetable, curriculum, festival calendars photographs and titles of staff, outings, and meetings. All visited settings used this device which is effective, if strategically placed, when parents arrive or gather to collect their child and have time and the ability to read it. Notices in community languages were observed in settings 9 and 13. Parental newsletters, in English, were given to all parents by settings 19 and 22. Twenty three of the twenty five settings in the research ticked the 'welcome poster in many languages' box on the questionnaire matrix. An information exchange through direct communication between practitioner and parent was observed in all settings visited.

Parents are asked what children eat and the languages spoken at home. The practitioners feel parents are very pleased to be asked cultural questions and are pleased staff are interested in this area.

(practitioner: setting 9)

Attend parents meetings on a regular basis ... a two-way communication between parents and staff.

(parent 18: setting 6)

Some parents enjoy the opportunity to work with a group of young children. Many people have moved from helping out at the (setting) to organizing groups themselves, or have been given the confidence they need to help them back into the world of work after being housebound for several years.

If you would like to come in and work alongside us sometimes please let us know.

(doc. setting 19)

Practitioner / parent communication.

- When doing home visits always tell parents we are a multi-cultural centre. We celebrate festivals. We encourage them to participate, and value all cultures. (practitioner: setting 22)
- Have tried group work about mixed heritage. (practitioner: setting 22)
- Organised Asian parents group with speakers, benefits and other advice, health promotion, outings. An interpreter assisted. (practitioner: setting 22)
- Welcome pack for parents. First page advises parents, in various community languages, that if spoken interpretation is needed they should talk to the setting staff. Reference is made to children who do not speak English, and the help they can expect. It clearly identifies the multi-cultural nature of the setting, and the importance of this. (doc. setting 19)

Parents spoken to by the researcher repeatedly cited how satisfied they are, the importance of the children playing together, that it is good to learn about other cultures, the benefits of socialisation, and the mix of children in the setting. No selection took place, other than that they had a few minutes availability, and seven parents and one grandparent were spoken to when they either arrived or at collection time on my visits to the five of the seven settings. (settings 9, 13, 18, 19, 22). Conversations were necessarily brief. Asked what culture and identity meant to them responses included 'how a child feels about itself' and 'who they are' (setting 19), 'Portuguese Muslim' and 'getting on with everybody' (setting 9),

'aware of their background and culture' (setting 18), 'colour, religion, Muslim religious – strict', 'Sikh, temple, language', 'fits in well', 'making her into her own person' (setting 22). This shows the varied replies, albeit brief, when asked to respond without time for thought.

Asked to expand on their views on promoting knowledge and understanding of a range of cultures they were positive in its importance, 'should know how other people live', 'good idea, everywhere you go there are mixed cultures, especially in this area (inner city)' (setting 22)

Icons of multi-culturalism.

Practitioners, if challenged to name four resources/ activities that promote cultural diversity, are likely to say celebrating festivals, ethnically diverse dolls, books, dressing up/ imaginative play. The research examined the value placed on these symbols, the use of these resources, and their place in the setting. These four items I define as icons of multi-culturalism, and they are important, but perhaps not always used in ways anticipated, or the extent expected.

From an my experience and an interpretive perspective I am able to observe the wide range of cultural factors in a setting which contributes to the support and development of cultural identity in young children. Others may attach less importance to some of these aspects and focus on the readily definable, tangible resources and activities that they think I, as a researcher, am looking for.

Festivals

Celebrating festivals is often the easiest area for practitioners to feel confident in introducing cultural diversity into the setting. Less experienced practitioners may not know where else to begin, and it is visually appealing to parents with limited judgement on the subject. Celebrating festivals is mentioned on twenty-five (33%) parental questionnaires as an example of how practitioners help their child develop a cultural identity. The multi-cultural matrix on the setting

questionnaire was ticked twenty-two times (88%) by practitioners, one deleted the word 'celebrating' and substituted 'awareness of' festivals. Two left the box blank. Settings see this aspect positively:

Our notice-board shows a calendar of festivals from all religions. We celebrate a different festival each month. We are lucky because we have Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Sikh practitioners representing different backgrounds. (practitioner setting 18)

We teach the children about the festivals celebrated by the children in the group and several others. (setting 13)

Children will be encouraged to welcome a range of different festivals, together with the stories, celebrations and special food and clothing they involve, as part of the diversity of life. (doc. setting 19)

It is understood by some parents that practitioners help the development of a child's cultural development by:

Being aware and celebrating all world faiths' main festivals e.g. making Eid cards, Diwali 'rangoli' patterns, Easter cards
(parent 53: Indian Hindu: setting 15)

and

General attention paid to multi-cultural issues e.g. celebration of a range of festivals including Diwali and Chinese New Year, Christmas and Easter.
(parent 9: European no religion: setting 4)

Not everyone agrees and it needs to be dealt with sensitively.

I think it (promoting knowledge and understanding from a range of cultures) is very important. However I draw the line at partaking in worship i.e. although I like my children learning about Christmas I do not let them partake in Christmas plays as they border on worship. I like my children learning about Diwali but they can't eat sweets offered to Hindu gods.

(parent 60: white Scandinavian Muslim: setting 18)

While not objecting to celebrating festivals other than Christian i.e. Chinese New Year there are parental concerns at a loss of traditionally English activities.

We live in a multi-cultural society but I'm also keen not to lose our British Christian identity and celebrate these festivals.

(parent 15: English/ Scottish Christian: setting 5)

This view is not held exclusively by the dominant ethnic majority:

I think children in non-English families should be brought up with both cultures. That includes celebrating their own festivities, speaking their mother tongue, etc. as well as the culture they live in day in day out. That helps them not to lose their own identity, and be a more confident grown-up in the future

(parent 51: Asian Muslim: setting 14)

Advice to practitioners comes from a parent with a training suggestion:

Further understanding of traditions and customs, not just holidays.

(parent 34: African/ Caribbean: setting 9)

Celebrating festivals needs to be balanced by every other activity and aspect of an early years setting. Celebrating festivals **is** an icon, but cultural identity is not defined by that alone.

Ethnically diverse dolls

It is not surprising ethnically diverse dolls come high on the list of icons as it is a recognised feature to be ticked, by Ofsted and others assessing the quality of the setting, as an identifier that the setting is recognising and addressing multiculturalism.

Ethnically diverse dolls are identified in all but one of the settings on the setting questionnaire matrix as one indicator of how the setting reflects a multicultural environment. Of the seven visited settings, dolls were seen at five of them (71%) at the audit, which was conducted at an initial visit before observations took place, and which consisted of looking around the premises identifying what could be readily seen in use and on display. Closed cupboards and drawers were not explored as I was viewing the setting as a parent would if they were considering taking up a place for their child in the setting. The diary entries of practitioners

show a 50% usage of ethnically diverse dolls during the two weeks after my observations. It was anticipated that dolls would feature highly in all the settings. Ethnically diverse dolls are one of the early examples given by practitioners to identify their cultural awareness and the need to provide culturally appropriate resources. Surprisingly, observations of practitioners and children showed a very low usage, dolls were played with at only six out of ninety-four observation sessions (6%). In addition, during event sampling, children playing in the home corner in one setting played with ethnically diverse dolls, pushing them around in a toy pushchair (setting 9). In another, dolls were offered as an activity at a table where children were encouraged to undress and dress the dolls and brush their hair (setting 6). This would imply that settings bought ethnically diverse dolls, that they were available for use, the practitioners put them out for use (and possibly thought they were used regularly), but that the amount the children used that particular resource was limited.

A setting can own equipment ... , but only use it intermittently. It can have a range of resources that could be used to encourage work with the children on equality and inclusion, but the resources may not be utilized to their full potential. It is not enough to have the resources; what is important is the way that children and adults in the setting use the resources that are available.

(Khan and Young 2007: 54)

Books

Good practice requires that every setting will have, as standard practice, books and this was confirmed by the matrix on the setting questionnaire. Only one setting (25) indicated that they did not have books. No specific identification was given as to the content of the books, practitioners have self-identified that there were titles in the setting relating to culture and cultural identity. This may relate to the text, the story line, and/or the illustrations. Publishers are aware of the need to represent all children and family backgrounds in illustrations, so these are more readily available than in previous decades, and would be expected on the settings' bookshelf. Public libraries encourage settings to borrow a box of books each term and these will add to the settings stocks. Children's librarians

will be aware of the need to offer a range of titles to reflect the ethnic population in England. Indeed one event sampled (setting 9) was a visit to the local library where librarians invited children, practitioners, and parents, to participate in the story telling and to share in fruit prepared as a story aid. One setting (19) specifically has a practitioner who speaks a community language to enable children to be read to, and hear stories, in more than one language.

All the settings visited had books in every room, easily accessible for the children and they did look at them. In the participant observation periods, books were used spontaneously for 16% of the time, practitioner diaries showed their use to be 59%. There were dual language books seen in some of the settings, particularly in areas of high minority ethnic populations.

Dressing up and imaginative play

As with many activities the level of cultural diversity represented will to a large extent depend on the awareness of the practitioners, for example the home corner could be set out as a kitchen with pots and pans, cups and saucers, and a plastic croissant and an onion for one practitioner to be satisfied there is a cultural element there, and for another the home has a wok, chopsticks, Chinese bowl and spoon, plastic dumplings, a poster of kitchen gods on the wall, a good luck wall hanging, a shopping bag with shopping list in Chinese characters, Chinese costumes to wear, dolls with Chinese features and bed-linen featuring Chinese patterns.

Dressing up clothes, to include multi-ethnic outfits and accessories, were self-identified on the questionnaire matrix for all except one of the settings. The majority had observable outfits on audit, and practitioners claimed dressing up clothes were used in 37% of sessions over a two week period following my visits; my observations showed a different result. Children were seen on only three occasions wearing dressing up clothes out of a potential 94 observations (3%),

excluding event sampling. One event sampled (setting 18) describes children dressing up from a wide choice of costumes, with encouragement from the practitioner. Boys were asked to pick a girl and take them to the dressing up clothes. A sari was spread on the floor and children sat around having a 'pretend' tea using Asian cooking pots and plastic food. In another (setting 13) a child confidently brought an Indian dressing up skirt to a practitioner to help put on. This indicated to me the child is used to this activity in this setting. In another setting (19) children were dressed up in costumes while participating in another unrelated activity. So children have access to dressing up outfits and choose to wear them at different times, and for different effects. The significance lies in them being there as part of the everyday 'normal' experiences.

Even the youngest children can enjoy imaginative play Setting 9 currently caters for under-three-year-olds and has a home corner on one side of the room, and a large playhouse containing chairs and a full size mirror on the other. The door and ceiling are draped in sari fabric, another example of bringing the cultural dimension into the setting.

It is very important that children know their cultural identity it helps them to know who they are (parent 31)

Using researcher-introduced resources

To establish how culturally designed resources would be used by the practitioners, and received by the children, I took a selection into each setting to observe interaction. The practitioner was given no instruction as to their use.

Each setting was given a picture lotto matching game with head and shoulder photographs of children on. Most discussed the faces, played the traditional game with older children, matched the faces with the younger children, or played a matching pairs game. Some practitioners explained the game to the children, others just put them out and left the children to work it out. Some practitioners

were actively engaged, others not. The most successful were where practitioners explained the game to the children and became actively involved in the activity.

Children fully engaged in the activity, carefully studying the features and searching for a matching face on the board. Pleasure expressed when pictures matched. Encouragement from practitioner 'well done'. Game continued until all faces had been matched.

New game, new children. ... (researcher's field notes: setting 4)

Practitioner sitting alone with faces spread out on the table. One child came with toy monkey and polar bear. The practitioner led the conversation to link a monkey in a story seeing the children in the lotto game. The child picked up a couple of faces and placed on the base card. She then left. Another child joined and began matching faces to base card. (researcher field notes: setting 19)

Practitioner collected four children, all white girls. Explained to the children what the game was about, showed photographs and said 'we will be looking to see what colour hair they have got'. She gave each child a base card of pictures. Discussed hair and eye colour, whether teeth could be seen, how many boys and girl there are. Identifying girl or boy on one-to-one basis. Counting boys, counting girls. (researcher field notes setting 6)

A second researcher-introduced resource was a set of three generation cardboard cut-outs, a white family, a black family, a South Asian family and an East Asian family. In this first example the youngest children in the research used these figures, in the second the children were about a year older.

White child excited at the sight of the figures. Picked out South Asian woman in a suit and said 'Nana'. He picked out several pieces and made sounds as if to identify them, but his language was not developed enough to understand ... (researcher field notes setting 9)

Spread out characters on table. Practitioner 'We've got daddy, can you all find mummy?' 'Can you find brother and sister to go with mummy and daddy?' 'Where does this lady go? Does she go in my family?' Children building together family groupings. Three children participating. (researcher field notes setting 13)

A third resource was a commercial set of 'family photographs'. This activity was particularly engaging for some children, some showing great enthusiasm.

Child identifying figures i.e. black practitioner and the researcher. Asian child excited at photograph of extended Asian family. Identified Grandad and papa. One child particularly interested in seeing photographs. Looking at clothes/ scarves. New Asian child looking at Asian family. Studying very closely. Practitioner said 'that could be your family'.
(researcher field notes setting 22)

The exercise demonstrated the ways resources could be used, and the variety of interpretations different practitioners and different children can place on them.

Summary of chapter and into the next

An overview is given of settings, parental, and practitioner contributions to the research, with the child at the centre. Areas covered are variables within the context of full-time or sessional, the location, and the ethnic mix of practitioners and children. Some parents seemed totally unaware of what actually goes on in their child's setting and consequently are unable to make comment on training needs of practitioners. Others have useful suggestions, and a number suggested themselves as resources for training. The iconic symbols of festivals, dolls, books, dressing up and imaginative play are discussed which leads in to examples of researcher-introduced resources.

These areas, and the case study findings in Chapter 4, will be explored in the next chapter under discussion and analysis.

CHAPTER 6 - DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. Clifford Geertz (1926-2006)

The diamond cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials
Chinese Proverb

Introduction

This chapter is the culmination of all that has gone before in this thesis, a distillation of received wisdom through the many researchers and practitioners who preceded me, and a look ahead to where we can carry this research forward. I present this chapter in four parts broadly in relation to the three research questions, with a separate section for the case studies, and consider:

Part 1:

1. Research Question

What do practitioners and parents identify as specific factors in the cultural environment of the early years setting which support the development of cultural identity of young children?

- The first part relates to the effects of the research on researcher and researched. It describes how the data was analysed and sets the scene for what follows, examining how the setting is expressing itself to the parents through its Equal Opportunities policies, through its monitoring process, and societal views. Some parents made reference to white/English culture being ignored and this is discussed.

Part 2:

2. Research Question. How do the values and ethos of practitioners in early years' settings impact in the formation of the cultural identity of young children?

- The second section examines the contribution to practice through the various types of settings and named-practitioners. Valuing the contribution language makes to the child, family, setting and community

adds to the development of cultural identity in young children. A number of contributions were made by parents and practitioners as to relevant training for practitioners and how this might be achieved.

Part 3:

- The seven case studies are discussed, their differences and similarities, and the contribution to the research.

Part 4:

3. Research Question. What aspects of the cultural environment in early years setting are conducive to the positive development of cultural identity in young children?

- Iconic symbols of multi-culturalism are examined in further detail, it is not what is in a setting, but how it is used. The value of the researcher-introduced resources are assessed both for their intrinsic value, how they were presented to the children by the named-practitioners, and how they were received by the children.

Part 1

Effects on and of a researcher

Research is a process that has an effect on researcher and researched. By doing this research I have changed, and I hope the results of my research will have an effect on others. I owe that to the people who have been involved in the process. I went into the research with a certain amount of subject knowledge, and knew what I was looking for – good practice that demonstrated how settings contributed to supporting and developing young children's cultural identity. I could not be neutral, I devised research instruments to record a range of data to diminish subjectivity in the research as much as possible, and to enable there to be replicability of procedures, and reliability of interpretation. Greene and Hill (2005: 8) sum this up as:

The lens of the observer or researcher inevitably distorts. Many social scientists, but not all, would accept that the objective researcher is a myth and that it is essential for researchers to scrutinize and take account of their own position as an enquirer.

In being conscious of that effect on myself I also had to question the effect of myself on those being researched. When researching by observation, or receiving written responses, with any group or individual there is always the consideration 'do they normally do this, or is this a show for the researcher?', or is the respondent thinking 'what should I say' or 'what does the researcher want me to say?'. It should be recognised that the influence of the researcher being present may have an effect on actions within the setting; most probably that, within this research, activities relating to culture would be more evident than at other times. When practitioners know what is being observed they may, in wanting to assist the researcher, concentrate on culturally related actions and activities during this period. This would apply to both the resources taken into the setting by the researcher, and any other activities being presented on the days the researcher is observing, and the attention being given to them. This is referred to as the Hawthorne effect and summed up by Sarantakos (1997: 179) as:

Changes might be caused by the fact that subjects know they are being studied (also referred to as the reactivity effect)

As an experienced practitioner/ researcher I was able to interpret these actions, using additional data such as participant observations, cultural audit of setting, practitioner's diaries, and evidence of activities undertaken prior to the research (painting, craft work, photographs, etc.). I also drew on the experience of other researchers, having made reference to these at various points in the thesis, in order to devise the methodology used (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998, Christensen and James 2000, Kenner 2000, Clark and Moss 2001, Rolfe 2001, McKechnie and Hobbs 2004, Greene and Hill 2005).

In all of the seven settings observed and examined practitioners were interested in the subject matter of the research and eager to co-operate with me. Asking children to do self-portraits, with appropriately coloured paper and paint or crayons is not uncommon. This happened in two of the settings (18 and 22) where children were asked to draw a picture of themselves while I was present on a pre-arranged visit, on white paper using skin tone crayons and pencils. Did I affect that action? This is an activity that could be expected to be undertaken in the settings, but may have been offered at that time to show evidence of culturally initiated practice. The surprise was that if it was for show it was only half done, as in neither setting was skin-toned paper offered to the children. Skin toned paper was one of the items to tick in the matrix boxes on the setting-questionnaire. Setting 18 left the box blank, setting 22 indicated they used skin toned paper, although they did not do so on this occasion. However setting 22 did tell me about painting faces on windows and on paper plates, which would indicate that self-portraits are part of the curriculum for this setting.

I believe it is important to provide skin toned paper and paints in early years' settings. This material is not readily available on the high street, so not generally accessible to parents, yet vitally important for young children to be able to do self-portraits in colours that match their skin tone. Otherwise they become invisible, a non-person, accepting that only white is acceptable. Feeling they are integral to the setting takes on a different meaning.

Named-practitioners were asked to keep a tick-sheet diary for ten sessions immediately following my visits – a session being a morning or an afternoon, to indicate if a particular activity was used at that session. Diaries were received from six of the seven named-practitioners. I question the accuracy of some of the responses. In regard to 'skin toned paint, paper, crayons' of the above two settings these were the recordings – in setting 18 they were in use for 20% of the sessions; setting 22 were a little more specific and underlined crayons in use in

40% of the sessions. These figures may well be so. No diary was received from setting 13, despite several reminders and replacements, but skin toned crayons and chalk was on display in the setting, the setting-questionnaire matrix indicated they had paper too; however the conversation I had with the named-practitioner indicated she thought they should have more. Of the rest, setting 4 had no use for skin toned products over the ten sessions, and they were not ticked on the setting-questionnaire matrix, which would fit in with other views of their lack of cultural awareness. Of the rest of the settings they all ticked on the setting-questionnaire that they had skin toned paint, crayons, pencils and paper for use in their settings. The all white group recorded a use of 20% and at the other end of the scale the setting (9) with the youngest children indicated an 89% usage rate although I did not see any usage on the four visits I made to the setting. The one setting (19) with a score of 70% I feel was likely as I believe its levels of cultural awareness is high and this activity is likely to be a regular feature of this setting. There were self-portraits on display in this setting imaginatively arranged around a display about moving on to the schools the children will be attending. While the intention of the research is to be as naturalistic as possible, the researcher needs to be aware that there are variables which may affect the result.

Practical implications of researching

How you systematically and logically draw together data from the raw processes, how you analyse the data, the rigour of your analysis, the interpretation of those data, the subsequent dissemination of the research results are vital elements of the research process, demanding many research skills as well as integrity. The process also demands the ability to be both reflective and reflexive. A researcher needs to engage in reflection throughout to ensure that the research is appropriately conducted, in order that the experience and understanding brought to the research is fully exploited and with proper attention to ethical considerations. Reflexivity means that one is aware of one's own potential influence on the research process, as a result of one's standpoint and assumptions.

(Aubrey et al 2000:5)

My experience as researcher is one of gratitude and privilege at being treated so generously in so many settings, being allowed to watch practitioners work, to be given additional information, and to be treated so professionally. A researcher must not become too involved in the setting, there has to be a degree of detachment so that the normal activities are continued whilst the researcher is there, and for it not to be an abnormal experience. Childcare and early years' practitioners are used to having inspections and advisory visits and generally take it all in their stride. After greeting me, most forgot I was there, working very naturally with the children. The exception possibly was with the researcher-introduced resources, which were new to both practitioner and children, with a request to put them out during one of my visits. Most named-practitioners were actively involved in their presentation, encouraging, and stimulating the children, suggesting they look carefully at the figures, identify them, recognise features, and match them to others. One named-practitioner just put them on the table, did or said nothing, and children showed little interest in the figures. I found even very young children fascinated by the researcher-introduced people resources, even if they are unable to relate them to their personal experience and identify them as characters they know.

naturalistic observations as research strategies are: first, the nature and development of children's close relationships with other children - their siblings and friends; second, their understanding of other people; third, the link between their emotional experiences and their social understanding
(Dunn 2005: 88)

I generated a lot of data which I had to organise it in such a way so that I could a) handle it and b) make sense of it. There were questions that I asked myself such as 'how do I understand and interpret this setting/ activity/ or event?' or 'what difference does full-time or sessional make?'. I recognised that I had to be selective, that I needed to layer the data in order to interpret it.

Terminology

Terminology is a sensitive issue, whatever criteria is used it will upset somebody. While we all use 'labels' to categorise other people, this is a protective instinct to identify danger, we do not necessarily like to label ourselves. This is problematic for researchers. The Daycare Trust (2008a: 3) surveyed the black and minority ethnic workforce and reported 'It is acknowledged that the term 'black and minority ethnic' can be problematic and mis-leading' and was a point raised by 'numerous research participants'.

Creating inclusive childcare environments in which all cultures and religions are recognised and celebrated was seen as important by participants. Many saw this as a positive way of exposing children to the different cultures and ethnicities they are likely to come into contact with in their communities and in particular their schools. In fact, not having this exposure was seen by many participants as putting the children at risk of disadvantage once they leave the early years settings.

Making assumptions about people that are based on appearance or ability constitute stereotyping, and this can be very damaging for a child. A research question raised by this issue in Argyle's view (1969: 14) is 'how prevalent are stereotypes and caricatures of black people and how much do they impact on behavioural 'norms'?'. Even today comments made by black parents and practitioners (setting 13) reveal that they feel things have not moved on very far, and these attitudes are still prevalent.

Black and ethnic minority children also suffer from the devaluing effects of stereotyping which can lead them often to reject unconsciously their own culture and its values, and consequently , in a sense , their own being and self identity. (Commission for Racial Equality in Scotland 2008: 13)

Time changes terminology and viewpoint. Influences from the USA began to permeate this country's consciousness in the 1980s particularly with Derman-Sparks and the A. B. C. Task Force, producing the Anti-Bias Curriculum at a time when little thought had been given to this subject. Their work still holds value, although terms like handicappism and some of the stereotypical examples given,

which should be avoided when choosing books for children, have long since been abandoned by publishers. Breaking down the barriers of prejudice and bias does not come without effort, and has generations of history behind it. In 1991 in the history museum of the State University of New York an exhibition 'traced how, for much of this century, some games, toys, and dolls were modelled on stereotypical images' (Powell Hopson et al 1993: 126).

If children are encouraged early in life to develop a positive view of themselves and others, they may be less prone to discriminate as they grow older. (Commission for racial equality in Scotland 2008: 8)

All the the settings surveyed gave positive responses, and comments made in those visited have been recorded and, where appropriate, reported in this thesis. Some parental comments were negative or inappropriate and these too have been noted in this thesis.

Equal opportunities

When surveyed in relation to children who use English as an additional language only 25% of settings had an Equal Opportunity Policy (Leicester City Council 2001: 8). Equal opportunity is the backdrop of the ethos of the settings in relation to this research. All early years settings registered by Ofsted are required to have an Equal Opportunity Policy. It is desirable that the staff team in the setting write their own policies, in consultation with the parents and taking account of current legislation and mores, to ensure it both applies to societal norms and is 'owned' by those required to implement it. Failure may come when ownership is outside the setting, when it is drawn up as a corporate document and information does not trickle down, when practitioners do not know of its existence or content, or do not understand it.

SureStart guidance (2004: 3) aimed at local authority early years officers and equality coordinators in early years' settings states:

They must **promote equality of opportunity**:

- ensure that everyone in the setting is equally valued, treated with equal respect and concern, and that the needs of each are addressed
- ensure that each child and family has equal access and entitlement to all available opportunities for learning, experiences and resources

The ethos and values of a setting are embedded in their Equal Opportunity Policy, which arises from all the guidance, legislation, social policy, and Human Rights declarations that drive it forward.

Monitoring and parent expressions

Some parents, particularly, feel a conflict when it comes to monitoring provision; this was evident from some of the parental-questionnaires. There were objections, even resentment, to completing monitoring boxes to identify ethnicity and religion. Most people are familiar with the convention of identifying ethnic origin used in the Census, and subsequently on many documents and monitoring forms, so this was used on the questionnaires for this research. Wanting parents, and practitioners, to feel comfortable about completing this section, after consultation at the pilot stage, I added boxes to reflect a specific group I was aware of in the area (Pagan), and room for individuals to express how they would like to identify themselves. (It is after all research on identity). Reference was also made to the word Pagan on the setting-questionnaire (13) in the context that 'is not a category we have on our monitoring – what does it mean – we are not sure'. As society becomes more diverse, with higher numbers of inter-ethnic relationships, and there is more 'mixedness and mixing' (Owen 2007), it will be difficult for some people to 'fit' any specific box. There must always be the opportunity for self-definition, and this was offered, although even that did not suit all. The contradiction was that while some balked at fitting themselves into boxes they were mostly positive about the rest of the questionnaire. They thought it very important and were generally positive about their children learning about their own and other cultures. Yet without monitoring, without it being an exact science, alternative means would have to be devised to establish this information in order to ensure equity, balance,

recruitment of practitioners, and as is often the case in these circumstances, to meet funding criteria.

Research published by the Daycare Trust (2008b) reported that currently, local authorities are not 'under any obligation to monitor the ethnicity of childcare users or the childcare workforce within their area' consequently the amount of data collected varied across the country. Of the 44 local authorities who responded to the survey (Daycare Trust 2008c: 7) 30 stated that they collected and monitored information about the ethnicity of families using childcare services, 35 said they collected and monitored ethnicity of the childcare workforce, and 14 the languages spoken by the childcare workforce. Some local authorities (Daycare Trust 2008c: 12) alleged 'childcare providers were obstructive in providing information about ethnicity. ... concerned that they may be criticised for not being sufficiently diverse'. The examples, given above, may also indicate a reluctance by some parents and practitioners to 'fit themselves into boxes', and may also be part of the problem.

Childcare and early years' practitioners, and parents, from minority ethnic populations play a powerful part in how identity is perceived, the status of the children is enhanced, the richness of the provision improved, and negative stereotypes are challenged. Parents welcome this diversity, particularly if the practitioners speak the heritage language of the child. Practitioners of all ethnicities need to speak the 'language of diversity and difference' it is not the exclusive responsibility of BME practitioners to set the agenda.

Debates about 'White' culture

Several comments were made on the questionnaires, both setting and parental, which questioned issues around white English culture (Chapter 3) and the apparent fear of its demise. The cultural bias obscures the reality in that we largely live in a white society, in which the media is largely white, language, signage and books are all in English, the education system is in English, shops start groaning under the weight of Santa's sack in November and traditional

foodstuffs line the supermarket shelves. There is increasing variety in food shops, most of it readily accepted and welcomed, but for decades we have enjoyed Chinese food, curry houses, pizzas, and a whole variety of fruit and vegetables from around the world without considering the origins of the menu or ingredients. Ethnic cuisine has been absorbed into the culture, and those making the comments about the demise of white English culture probably enjoy these foodstuffs as much as anyone. Curry has ousted fish and chips as the country's favourite take-away.

Fay Weldon in Chapter 2 claims multi-culturalism here has failed, but we seem to be using that term in two different ways. There is ideological multi-culturalism and multi-culture in practice. Much has been debated recently about the failure of multi-culturalism in Britain, with ghetto-isation, and non-integration of minority ethnic groups. Multi-culture in practice is what I observed in the settings visited and it is largely a force for good. Good multi-cultural practice will include anti-discriminatory practice which challenges attitudes harmful to children. Brown (1998: 45) asserts;

Embedding anti-racism and multi-cultural education into nursery/ school ethos and practice gives all children the opportunity to develop to their maximum potential ... An anti-discriminatory approach shapes policy and practice in a range of ways ...

Multi-culture does not exclude the white English culture, it is integral to it. Certainly in the settings I visited there was no evidence that English culture was ignored – Christmas was always cited as a festival they celebrated, books in every setting were in English, some dual language, traditional English nursery rhymes sung, and the main language spoken was English. Hundal (2007) asserts that:

... a frequent complaint ... is that white people in England are not allowed to express their own cultural values; that somehow, ethnic minorities are stopping them.

This is quite bizarre given the fact that Britain, outside London and parts of Birmingham, is still overwhelmingly white;

Day after day I see ethnic minorities being blamed for 'destroying the English way of life'. They do nothing of the sort.

There seems to be a crisis of confidence in a section of the white community that instead of finding out, and taking action if that is appropriate, they make assumptions that everything is 'foreign' and that the minority ethnic populations are to blame. Local authorities and some major organisations have not helped the process of integration by banning 'Christmas' renaming it a 'winter festival', and being afraid of offending minority populations. I have seen no evidence of this through multi-culturalism in practice. On the contrary those with faith from the minority population would prefer people to be committed to any faith rather than none. Indeed I was once invited to speak about Christmas traditions at a Hindu Christmas party where 100 adults listened with attention. This was between the prayers in Sanskrit and Hindu teenagers singing Christmas carols. Parental-questionnaires, including those from minority ethnic parents, cited again and again lists of religious festivals they wanted their children to know about, including Christian festivals. Faith support and development comes from within the home, settings celebrate the cultural aspect of the religions. Whatever is happening in the settings, the child's family have the most profound effect on their cultural identity, their religion, and their spectacles of sight, their perception of the world. Browne (2007: 59) considers the various identities we all have, as described in various ways in Chapters 1 and 2 as a jigsaw of life, a kaleidoscope, and a faceted diamond.

Children do not passively absorb their identities; instead they are active agents in creating them. Children's identities emerge through their engagement in a range of discourses: not all of these discourses will provide the same world-view and some of the discourses will conflict with each other.

In her paper on the absence of black voices in early years Kwhali (2006) discusses the inequalities between different racial groups with those who are white. She sees little value in equal opportunities as she feels it has been so diluted as to apply to everyone, not just the disadvantaged. In her discussion on the Government's 10 year strategy for childcare she sees no equity. She says that early years practitioners are:

... in a privileged position of trust. They are caring for, educating and shaping new and fertile young minds and overtly and covertly providing them with information about which social and ethnic groups are most valued and promoted. This is done through the curriculum, play materials, staffing, reading books, songs, music, food, environment, ... Each time a small child is subjected to a racist taunt or is teased about their colour, appearance or beliefs and has that experience negated s/he is being taught a powerful message about exclusion. Every time a white child sees only white people in influential decision making positions or is exposed to a monolithic culture they are absorbing important lessons on inclusion.

This then is an answer to those white parents who claim we are losing our culture in favour of Asian and other cultures. There is more awareness of the variety of cultures in the country, and an attempt to be inclusive, but we are nevertheless embedded in an English white culture, and that is why research of this type is so valuable, because it is telling us what we are doing, and pointing us in the direction of where we should be going. The fact that the dominant white culture exists as an all enveloping mantle that few people can avoid in this country seems to have passed some people by.

Human beings are not only individuals but also culturally embedded ... the logic of multi-culturalism qualifies and informs the logic of human rights, just as the logic of human rights qualifies the logic of multi-culturalism.

(The Runnymede Trust 2000: 91)

A question to consider is 'is there such a thing as a black culture, and a white culture?'. The answer must be no, there was never a white mono-culture in this country, any more than there was a black mono-culture in sub-Saharan Africa. We have always been a mixture of tribes and inequities – the rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate, just as Africa is many countries and many,

many tribes, each distinctive with their own customs, traditions and beliefs. In England there has, over the centuries, been countless invasions from Europe, people who have stayed and settled in a similar way to those now coming from the European Union and beyond. The difference now, since the Second World War is that the incomers, described politically as Black, are much more visible because of the colour of their skin. Modood (2007: 2) statement describing, as he sees it, the political idea of multi-culturalism as 'the recognition of group differences within the public sphere of laws, policies, democratic discourses and the terms of shared citizenship and national identity' seems to be the way forward.

Article 2 in UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) states

In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together. Policies for inclusion and participation of all citizens are guarantees of social cohesion, the vitality of civil society and peace. Thus defined, cultural pluralism gives policy expression to the reality of cultural diversity. Indissociable from a democratic framework, cultural pluralism is conducive to cultural exchange and so to the flourishing of creative capacities that sustain public life,

Settings offer a continuum of culture and we must ensure we move along it, taking the children with us. In the context of the early years setting we can treat all children equitably, challenge racism, value diversity and languages, and that is our role.

Racism is a subtle and complex phenomenon. ... Whatever its subtle disguises and forms, it is deeply divisive, intolerant of differences, a source of much human suffering ... It can have no place in a decent society.

We approach the current state of multi-ethnic Britain against the background of these and related beliefs. We believe that it is both possible and vitally necessary to create a society in which all citizens and communities feel valued, enjoy equal opportunities to develop their respective talents, lead fulfilling lives, ... help create a communal life in which the spirit of ... shared identity and common sense of belonging goes hand in hand with love of diversity.

(The Runnymede Trust: X)

Part 2:

Contribution to practice development

The purpose of this research was to identify good practice in relation to the development of cultural identity in early years' settings. By studying in-depth in seven varied settings across the city of Leicester, and the county of Leicestershire, this has been established. Actual provision will vary, as is appropriate in response to local circumstances and requirements, and as demonstrated here good practice can be achieved across a range of settings, with room for development.

Prior to commencing the research I was aware that there was much good practice being offered in early years' settings. By taking an interpretive methodological approach I have identified what this means in relation to the subject area, and am able to make this knowledge available to the early years and childcare community for inclusion in training programmes and continuing professional development. In recognising that this research is specifically contextualised, both in its location in Leicester and Leicestershire and the methodology of case studies and the practitioner's 'cultural journey', I believe it has something to say which can be applied in other situations. Most of all it is tomorrow's children who will benefit, whose lives will be enriched by the application of this knowledge, who will make lasting friendships, and experience the wonderful diversity our provision can offer.

The Pre-school Learning Alliance (2007: 7) expresses this sentiment by saying:

Working together can be exciting; a culture that is respectful of others and their possible differences and experiences recognising that we all come from a range of backgrounds, experiences and opportunities all contribute to a better and more informed understanding together. This can be a model for children to emulate in their own lives. That must be a goal worth striving for.

'Working together' is the phrase to be developed, as childcare and early years practitioners in settings do not operate in isolation. No one person can achieve what we want them to achieve – a stimulating, exciting, caring, culturally aware environment – alone. It demands team work and co-operation, commitment and

willingness, tolerance and understanding, and a well trained work-force. Some settings will have the privilege of being placed in ethnically diverse areas, where they have a great opportunity to be culturally immersed over those many settings in largely, or all white locations.

It cannot, however, be taken as a given that being in the former situation guarantees the cultural mix of practitioners, or level of awareness that is desired, as was shown in the case study of Setting 4. Located in that rare position of an affluent, green, desirable, 'nice' area, it is nevertheless defined as inner city, where 36% of the population citywide are from minority ethnic groups (Census 2001). A ten minute walk takes you to the city centre vibrant with people of all ethnicities, cultures, and religions. Women in extravagantly coloured outfits and flowing scarves twinkling with sequins rub shoulders with women wearing the hijab, and some the niqab, where Muslim men in traditional robes and headdress go about their business and every type of fresh fruit and unusual vegetable is available in the market; this is the world in a teacup. There was no shortage of trained practitioners within the city boundaries that could explain why all the other inner city settings visited could recruit an ethnically diverse workforce, but this one not. The setting itself did not have a culture, at the time of my research, for recruiting and retaining practitioners from minority ethnic groups. Consequently the setting was poorer for that. This would be difficult challenge to address. One BME practitioner may feel uncomfortable in this setting, may feel intimidated, may experience criticism if suggesting alternative culturally appropriate activities, or may be reluctant to share a deeper cultural understanding with colleagues. Yet it would be even more difficult to have more than one black member of staff as they tend to be recruited one at a time – someone would have to break the mould. It would require a very special person to take on this challenge. There may possibly be candidate in setting 13 (see case study) who in an environment of 100% minority ethnic practitioners, in what I saw as a vibrant multi-cultural setting, was critical at the lack of sufficient resources particularly for black children.

With the current ambition of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (TSO 2007) to have one graduate leader in every private, voluntary and independent full-day care setting, and two per setting in disadvantaged areas by 2015 practitioners will, of necessity, need to become more aware of early years' research, while many will be actively involved as part of this process. I aim to add to that body of knowledge.

All of the settings visited visually showed a positive approach to multi-culturalism. There were posters of happy families and grinning children, photographs of practitioners and children from that setting, displays of appropriate books, parental notice-boards often with information in the community languages, posters displaying welcome in numerous languages, and in a prominent position children's craft work perhaps associated with a festival. So the initial impressions were of approval of diversity. Underneath that, the research demonstrated, in some instances, a lack of awareness and understanding of cultural issues. In Setting 6 the practitioner had not picked up on the significance of the Jewish Star of David, or been aware of the lack of black dolls in High Street stores. Set in a festival time-frame of Chinese New Year, Diwali, and Christmas, with 'other?' (never mentioned) festivals in between. Setting 4 fell into the trap of outwardly purporting to be culturally inclusive yet not having the awareness and drive to move the setting on, to develop. This becomes self-fulfilling with an expectation for future practitioners continuing the 'tradition' of the three pillars of festival-ism covering three countries – China, India, and England.

Having 'someone who looks like you' in the setting is very comforting for a small child. It gives a sense of belonging. It will not be possible to accommodate all ethnicities or languages in the setting for children from diverse and disparate countries, and research shows (Daycare Trust 2008b: 6) that 'asylum seekers and refugees had particularly low levels of awareness of childcare services and where to access information' and would need encouragement or outreach to find

the support they need. Recruitment of practitioners is a critical aspect of ensuring an appropriate ethnic and linguistic mix in the setting to represent the children and the local population. Jones (1999: 12-13) suggests consideration when appointing practitioners, for example 'should the vacancy be targeted at disabled or ethnic minority applicants?' and 'if the person to be replaced spoke Urdu, which is the language relevant to the setting, then you should make this a desirable skill for the new applicant'. The Daycare Trust (2008a: 6) survey shows practitioners feel that this is not always possible and that:

Creating a welcoming and inclusive childcare environment is seen as crucial to the uptake of the service among the most excluded ethnic communities. Encountering childcare workers of the same ethnicity as BME families seems to enhance their sense of familiarity and belonging. However ... being of the same ethnicity as the local families is far less important than simply being able to provide a familiar, welcoming and non-threatening environment. Similarly, participants felt that being able to speak even a few words of a family's first language can be an extremely effective way of making them feel welcome and understood

Practitioners are brilliant at communicating with pre-verbal children, so are able to read the cues, interpret the non-verbal communication, and anticipate the basic needs of the children. Children find a common language. Changing tides of transient populations means that the children attending at the time of my visits and speaking Kutchi, Somali, French, Dutch, Swahili, Gujarati, Urdu, Arabic, Portuguese, and English (as in Setting 9) may well have moved on next month, or next year, and a whole new raft of languages will be added to the range. Practitioners employ a communicative approach to language using any words they know in the child's heritage language and teaching a second, usually English, through language use in everyday objects and situations. They also ask parents to teach them basic words in the language the children can understand, and parents suggested teaching them words like toilet, please, and thank you. So this interchange of ideas from either side, of practitioner to parent and parent to practitioner, moves closer together to meet the child in the middle of the bridge.

Children who have been uprooted from one culture to another, and maybe not even acclimatised to that one before moving to another experience will suffer culture shock in the same way adults feel disorientated when they get off the plane in a dramatically different culture. It can be stressful, cause anxiety or insecurity until the child feels comfortable in the setting. The attention of quietly spoken practitioners reduces that stress and helps children feel comfortable and relaxed as demonstrated in successive visits to Setting 9. Being unable to communicate in a familiar language is unsettling and disturbing as it challenges the child's inner being, the 'who am I' character which no longer fits so comfortably, as 'language plays an important role in maintaining cultural identity' (Brown 2001: 122). Baker (2007: 158) reinforces the view of the adaptability of children given the right circumstances.

Children are resilient and adapt to new circumstances and situations with an ease that many adults do not predict. Nevertheless, for all children, there is a transition period, of adapting to new environments, new friends, a new (setting), and a new pattern of living. The home and family become an important source of stability, strength and continuity for the child.

Language

Walk through the streets of Leicester and hear the call of 'united nations'; it is a cosmopolitan city with a wealth of language opportunities to call on. A questionnaire (Leicester City Council 2001: 3) asked for the experience of practitioners in Leicester in supporting children who use English as an additional language. Eighty percent of respondents said they had had this experience, which is not surprising when children for whom English is an additional language are in attendance at 75% of the settings. The ability of practitioners to speak the language of the children is seen as a valuable asset by the parents, and they are good role models if they are able to switch from one language to another, while parents feel others just need to learn a few simple but relevant words. Also seeing the script of different languages raises children's awareness that the formation of different marks has meaning and is given equal status to those who

read other languages, as exemplified in the setting 13 case study (in Chapter 4 and this Chapter). Words from other languages are continually being adopted in the English language, having parallels with 'culture, like language, is dynamic and ever changing' (Siraj-Blatchford 1994: 28).

The New Zealand curriculum Te Whariki (Chapter 2) demonstrates how, within accepted norms in initial training, words can be introduced which have special meaning for the relevant children (in this example Maori). It would not be so relevant in England, as there are so many languages spoken, so it would not be helpful to use the same words all over the country, but practitioners could learn a few words relevant to the location, possibly in more than one language. Indeed in New Zealand it is English and the Maori words used when there are other minority ethnic groups, particularly Samoan, who are left out of this equation. It may not be possible to include all the languages spoken by children and parents in a setting as shown in setting 9. London has the highest number of languages spoken by children, and strategies have to be developed to accommodate this growing challenge (see Chapter 2).

Communicating simple greetings and instructions to the children, like 'good morning' or 'sit on the carpet' is one practical aspect of language, another is using appropriate and sensitive dialogue which does not discriminate against the child. Being aware of the reactions of others, children and adults, dealing with racist remarks sensitively, empathising with those who have been upset or offended, and welcoming diversity are vital to the emotional well-being of the children and their families. Words are used as an expression of thought, so unless practitioners are thinking the right thoughts their dialogue may misrepresent the situation; this was exemplified by a parent at setting 22 (Case Study in this Chapter). It is a learning process and practitioners must learn the appropriate word for an object or building, an unfamiliar festival, how to address comments made by others, and to say the child's name. Language is such a valuable commodity, but it can be misused.

Training

The cultural and religious net of Leicester is wide, strong and welcoming. Resources are on the doorstep of settings in inner city Leicester, and close enough to access for those in the outer city, suburbs, and county areas. It is relatively easy to arrange visits to mosques, gurdwaras, mandirs, the synagogue, churches, and the Chinese Centre and to have visitors to the setting from different community members. This was considered one valuable element to be included in a potential training programme for practitioners. The geographical location of much of this research is particularly rich in human resources from the minority ethnic population, and the practitioners appreciate the advantages they have over many others. In some parts of the country this type of training and awareness may be more difficult to achieve. It was suggested by practitioners that a training pack to raise cultural awareness may be appropriate, and this may go some way in addressing a lack of access to training courses. A number of retail outlets in the city sell artefacts for display and discussion, posters, books, photo-cards, costumes; also multicultural play resources are available, some on the high street, a good source being a range in Oxfam shops.

As could be anticipated cultural diversity, knowledge based training, understanding culture and traditions, multi-faith awareness, race equality, anti-discriminatory practice, Persona dolls, and more ideas or activities to develop cultural identity were all suggested areas for training by practitioners. As with all training the emphasis must be on not what the trainees know, but what they do not know. Siraj-Blatchford (1994: 152) adds to this concept 'it is not only what is experienced in life that contributes to our attitudes but also what is omitted, what we do not experience'. As has been shown in the research not all practitioners are experienced in working with people of different cultures, or understanding of the nuances of supporting the development of cultural identity in the children. A significant number of practitioner respondents suggested the need for training in liaising and working with parents.

Having a proper understanding of equal opportunities, gender stereotyping and religious differences enables staff, workers and parents to promote positive images for individuals. (A Parent)

The relationship between practitioners, parents, and the development of cultural identity is a vital one. Working together they can produce a powerful team: two groups of people both party to cultural experience (their own and any working experience they have gained), wanting to share information for the benefit of the children. They can in addition have a great time in doing so. Practitioners, eager to understand the cultural perspective and parents want to know their child is being taken seriously. When arranging any exercise of this sort there has to be a balance between the desire of the setting to involve parents, and the demands made on parents from external sources, work, home, and other children for example. Much as they might want to play, that will not always be possible. Because of the various management structures it cannot be assumed that all full-day settings are run in the same way, likewise with sessional-settings. Some will be private profit making organisations, while many are community facilities where parents have a greater input and say in running the provision. The organisational structures of the settings in my research were not investigated.

All parents can contribute to cultural awareness raising, even if on a very small scale, by being given information on activity plans for their child and suggestions as to how they might play a part. This may indicate bringing an artefact in when the child arrives, and that is shared at carpet-time or put on a display, or a label written in a script other than English. Or food from their cultural background for a festival or party, and the parent plans to cook a little extra the night before. Or it could be having a day in the setting for a special multi-cultural event. Opportunities are there if looked for. For the child knowing that their parent and culture is valued, and if the heritage language is not English that that too is acceptable to the wider community, gives a powerful message. Parents can become positive role-models and the subtle cues of body language explained, interpreted and understood by practitioners and children.

Part 3:

The Case studies

Settings for in-depth examination were selected from the completed setting-questionnaires based on both the responses and locations; two in county towns, five in the inner city. The intention was to give a perspective as to whether the location affects the provision, while at the same time being capable of generating large amounts of data to demonstrate good practice. The results were not always as anticipated.

I: Setting 4

It was an unexpected result to find an inner city setting (4) with 40% of children from minority ethnic groups and all white practitioners being fixed in time; cultural awareness development apparently having been arrested after the visual impact, resources, and three festival celebrations. This setting did not appear to be moving on in attitude, despite the much greater opportunities for involving the diversity of parents, the possibility of recruiting minority ethnic practitioners from within the local community, and the benefits of the close proximity to the city centre. The Literature Review refers to the imbalance of practitioners in settings, particularly where one might assume it is possible to recruit a more diverse workforce. It would not be easy, and may indeed be uncomfortable for a black practitioner to work in an otherwise all white team, as the mono-culture of the setting may have been established over a long period of time. There would be barriers to break down and there may be an onus or expectation on the black practitioner to be the 'black voice' in the setting, when it should be everyone's responsibility. Recent research from the Daycare Trust 2008b: 7) makes clear that:

Having an ethnically diverse workforce is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it gives the right messages to BME families considering taking up childcare, enhancing feelings of belonging. Secondly, it is beneficial for children to be exposed to a range of ethnicities and cultures in their early years, increasing tolerance and acceptance. Finally, it is

beneficial for race relations generally, creating a situation where different ethnicities interact and establish relationships.

From the setting-questionnaires, practitioners are very positive about the importance of cultural diversity, which helps support the development of cultural identity, but may have no yardsticks with which to assess their own provision. Ofsted inspectors, because they are drawn from the pool of practitioners, may too have limited practical experience, but understand and try to implement the theory. To illustrate this point, at the time of the field research, this was to be the only Ofsted report for the settings visited (doc. setting 4), to be in the public domain, and no reference was made to the fact that in an inner city setting the ten practitioners were all white. It did refer to the fact that it has 'Investors in People' award, the inference being that they also do not require practitioners to be representative of the community or children in their care. Ofsted also recognise the positive relationships the setting has with the parents, that children and parents are greeted warmly and parental involvement encouraged, and the one line related to culture 'all children are valued and respected and a good range of positive resources are provided which reflect diversity'.

Evidence suggests (setting 6 in Chapter 4) having a largely, or all white, setting does not preclude a commitment to a multicultural environment. There has to be an openness by practitioners and a willingness to train and share experiences. The review of the literature relating to early years provision provided in a Christian context reveals why some settings, perhaps those with less experienced and trained practitioners, are not open to the benefits of being more inclusive. Christianity will not fail because of multi-culturalism in practice, indeed I believe it will be strengthened through understanding of others in their faith or none.

II: *Setting 6*

I expected the setting (6) with all white practitioners and children, in a largely all white town to be less culturally aware than I found them. From experience I

know that practitioners have to continually use professional judgements in these situations, and raise their consciousness to the wider cultural level, to even be aware of where the gaps are in their setting. The first step is the visual impact and resources, secondly the attitudes and awareness of practitioners, and thirdly the support of the parents. This setting (6) met the first criteria at a higher level than I expected, and that was gratifying. At the second level I judged that the practitioner had started on a journey of greater cultural awareness, which had started a short time before my involvement with the setting, and was growing within her. Her eyes were opening to a world that had previously been covered by a net curtain; chinks were emerging; the pattern on the curtain was developing and the weave opening up. I felt that a cultural paradigm was developing in this practitioner, much as my own developed many years ago. She was now starting to notice things she had not seen before such as there being no black dolls in the Argos catalogue. Also as a result of my comments she recognised the impact of inadvertent symbolism as in the incident of the child's name alongside the Star of David (see Chapter 4). This case study illustrates a lack of awareness of cultural issues which mirrors large parts of the country and many practitioners. Because it is not part of everyday experience, the cultural conscience is not called on sufficiently to raise awareness. Initial training courses for practitioners emphasise religion, food and festivals, leaving practitioners unaware of the subtleties of lifestyles and customs. There is a need for society to raise the level of debate so that there is more awareness of the development of cultural identity. Siraj-Blatchford (1994 70: see Chapter 2) identified that the place to 'develop racial equality care and education is in largely white areas' and this is still so today. Without the awareness spreading out of the diversity of the cities there will never be equity. Without that awareness in the adult being passed to the child, false views of the world are perpetuated, and negative stereotypes promoted. Powell Hopson et al (1993: 129) did a pilot study with young school children which demonstrated this view.

... we showed ... children pictures of a white man and a black man and asked the youngsters which type of person did they think had invented the roller coaster, the gas mask, the alarm clock, the baby crib, potato chips, or ice cream, or had discovered blood plasma. The majority of children, black and white, pointed to the picture of the white male, when in fact blacks were responsible. This is an example of the importance of raising awareness among youngsters ...

III: *Setting 9*

If there was no choice, and safety lay in Leicester, then having a run-down high rise flat with your children would seem a haven of peace; at least initially. Often fleeing oppression and poverty, fearing for life, having left everything behind and moving to a cold and lonely place, this estate may seem like an island of hope. But not for long. It is a transitory site, with much movement, and comings and goings, housing the vulnerable in society from home and abroad. Parents in this position are only too aware of how important it is for their children to receive stability, they need to be able to trust the provision, and for their children to have a safe place to play. This last sentence is reminiscent of comments made in the case study (Chapter 4) regarding Setting 4 but for different reasons. Parents from both settings *are* looking for provision they can *trust*, and is *safe*. Setting 4 looks good, has a high profile in the community, and consequently is favoured by them, parents feel safe in the knowledge that this is not a rough neighbourhood and, without really being aware of what goes on they trust it will be good for their children. Setting 9 is in a depressed part of the city providing for parents with a very different background. These parents are looking for a provision which is accepting of them with all their problems and issues, where the children will feel safe and have somewhere to play in a trusting environment. Setting 9, I knew to be offering a different sort of service to very young children from disadvantaged and potentially disturbed backgrounds. The commitment of this setting is expressed in their Equal Opportunities Policy:

The widest possible range of cultures and lifestyles should be reflected and represented positively

Although possibly not articulated by the practitioners, a stable, regular provision like this can be a life-line, a life-saver for parent and child. Children are given opportunities which are critical to their time-line of development, when life has been disrupted and turned upside down. The growing familiarity with the setting, the relationships within it, the acceptance of the neighbourhood surrounding it, will give a positive aspect to a grim life. Parents value this service; it is seen as a valuable resource which they do not want to lose. The conditions identified by Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000: 17), cited in Chapter 2, that are needed for learning to take place are particularly pertinent to this setting. Briefly they are the need for emotional well-being and security, positive self-identity and self-esteem, an appropriate curriculum, and the child to be engaged in the learning. People from one cultural background may respond and react differently to people from another cultural group. Practitioners need time to get to know the parents, to build up mutual trust, and to develop that awareness which may either integrate them into the setting, or alienate them from it which benefits no-one. Children are the ultimate beneficiaries of positive relationships.

In many ways children show us the way. None are born prejudiced. These innocent beings are naturally curious and readily accepting of friendship and love. (Powell Hopson et al 1993: 140)

The advantages of some of the other settings were not available here. The setting is a shared resource in a community building, the resources observed are limited due to the restrictions of having to pack everything away, largely in small cupboards, and the practitioners, while experienced, are not trained to a very high level. I did not have great expectations for this setting (my bias), yet the results were *outstanding*. Had I undertaken the research at some time other than within days of it re-opening after refurbishment, and the subsequent newly registered children, I may have seen quite different results. Once settled, having acquired language and communication skills, and possibly found the restricted resources self-limiting to development, I may have seen a very different picture. I was fortunate to be visiting at this particular time, and I am grateful to the practitioners for allowing me in at what for them was a challenging time, although they dealt with it admirably.

This setting is able to build up a good relationship with the parents. The practitioners spoke of the information they gained in the initial meetings, parents were encouraged to stay; their views were closely in accord with the practitioners in the Daycare Trust (2008b: 7) report when they said they:

... felt that individual needs and cultural requirements can and should be addressed when a family first makes contact with a setting – in this way an open dialogue is created with parents, ensuring their needs are met ... language skills can be addressed through good communication skills and attentiveness.

The children at this setting, if allowed to remain, will develop a relationship with the practitioners to build their confidence and self esteem, as will their parents. Dunn (2005: 87) describes this as:

children grow up in *social* worlds - complex networks of relationships with others. It is within these social worlds that they develop their powers of understanding, their ability to communicate, their sense of self, their adjustment and powers of coping with stress and change.

At the time of the field research no Ofsted report was available for this setting. A 2008 report is however, and it shows a development in the provision to full-day care, receiving a good report. It does however confirm the make-up of the community in that now 56 children attend and 'most children speak English as a second language', making their needs known with visual aids – pictures and symbols of activities or routines.

IV: *Setting 13*

Inner city setting (13) gave me the impression of a well resourced multi-cultural provision, with ethnically diverse practitioners catering largely for the local minority ethnic population, active, resourceful and appropriate. The impact of valuing diversity and languages features prominently in this setting, with its alphabet frieze in three languages painted as a border high on the walls around

the room, the welcome poster in many languages, the labelling of displays, dual language activity cards fixed to the wall – spot the difference, what is the girl doing?, which picture comes first?, what is happening?, dual language books, practitioners using the heritage language of the children, stories told, and language tapes. Also plenty of opportunities for the use of language in play, with practitioner encouragement, like sharing a magnifying glass or measuring one another, the imaginative area shop with its signs in various languages, and notices in community languages. But the perspective as viewed through the eyes of the black named-practitioner was not so positive. In sharing her ‘cultural journey’ she was asked about the resources in the setting. She was critical of the amount saying ‘there should be a lot more’ and specifically identifying ‘black and Asian dolls, books, and skin-toned modelling clay’. She also identified gaps in information requesting it for ‘black, white, and Asian’. The named-practitioner in acknowledging her level of knowledge about other cultures claimed she did have black, white, and Asian friends and has some knowledge of ‘what’s going on around me’ but that there were gaps in her knowledge. Significantly she identified additional books, reading material, and posters as being the items most needed, feeling the setting only had a ‘moderate’ amount of appropriate resources. Her experience of other settings (these would be personal rather than professional as she had only been working in a childcare setting for a few weeks) was not explored so I am unable to comment on any comparisons. My judgement, on the limited observational time I was there, was that, while there is always room for improvement, this setting gave a valid approach to cultural diversity in the resources present.

V: *Setting 18*

The research programme had to be adjusted a little in order to accommodate setting 18. The original concept was that I would examine, in-depth, six settings. These were selected, including this one, from the setting-questionnaire;

managers were approached and agreed for me to undertake this work with a named-practitioner. There were then unexplained delays, and procrastination, on the part of this setting in allowing me access. Research in the other five settings got underway and still no success in gaining access to setting 18. After many fruitless and frustrated attempts I decided to change the location and chose another setting willing to admit me. The week I started to visit for that piece of research, the last setting, setting 18 contacted me and said they were ready for me to go in and conduct the research. Having approached the manager so many times requesting entry I felt obliged to now follow it up.

The named-practitioner in this setting was a man, part of an ethnically diverse team. The children were very comfortable in the setting with their regular practitioners. Male child-carers are in short supply nationally with only about 2% of the practitioner population in this category. Practitioners have expressed that generally the childcare workforce is sufficiently ethnically diverse (Daycare Trust 2008b: 7) although some gaps were identified, particularly black BME childcare workers.

The setting is modern, with a calm atmosphere and quietly occupied children. The named-practitioner conducted himself in a very competent and professional manner, arranging my visits, being prepared when I had taken in researcher-introduced resources, and a willing participant in telling me his personal 'cultural journey'. The manager, with whom I only had occasional contact after the initial introductions, to me, did not always display the professionalism expected of someone in that position. For example I was in the setting one day at lunch time. The children were sitting around tables, with the practitioners joining them, having lunch together and chatting in a relaxed way. The manager came into the room carrying her plate of lunch and a fork. She barely spoke to anyone and instead of sitting at one of the tables with the children (there was space) she sat in an easy chair by the book shelves, curled her legs under her, and ate her lunch awkwardly balanced. Positive role models encourage good practice.

VI: *Setting 19*

The second county town setting (19), this time in a more industrialised location with a more diverse population than setting 6 also impressed me. I was expecting to see good practice in common with other groups of its type, for the practitioners to be offering their best and to be spending much time outside of the setting on the organisation and administration of the provision, and to have cultural awareness due to the mix of children and practitioners. I did not expect to be bombarded with cultural images and awareness which matched, if not exceeded some in the city, despite the fact that they too, as in setting 9, were in a shared community hall. My analysis of why I was so impressed was not so much in the resources in the setting, but the subtleties of the detail – the saris draping the climbing frame and being used for a shadow puppet theatre, practitioner conversations with the children extending their knowledge and understanding, the inclusiveness of the setting, the vivacity, vitality, and energy that invigorated everyone. It was a wonderful and positive atmosphere for the children to be in. The parents too were swept up in the enthusiasm, demonstrated by the time spent at the beginning and ending of the session when they did not want to leave. The atmosphere in this setting generates the optimum for learning from the culture around them, while giving full recognition of the child's cultural identity. Culture is not an 'add-on' in this setting, not something to be worked at; it is an integral and integrated aspect of the ethos of the setting. Lave and Wagner's (1991: 33) statement seems to describe just such a setting.

Learning that takes place in the full activity of normal life seems to be the most significant form of learning, both in terms of its impact on development as in terms of its abundance. It is referred to by such terms as non-formal, non-institutionalized learning, apprenticeship, guided participation

VII: *Setting 22*

In contrast I found the practitioners in setting 22 to be highly professional, well trained, and, despite working with some of the city's children most 'in need' and with 'special educational needs', they were able to gain their confidence, ensure their developmental progress through appropriate activities, aid their language development, and give them some fun. There were a number of parental support groups on different aspects affecting the children, like behaviour management, child development, building self-esteem, a support group for parents of children with dual heritage, informal group sessions, the attendance of specialist professionals, outings to fun places, occasional community events and 'parties'. Parents are very welcome here with drop-in sessions, a kitchen for them to make themselves drinks or lunch if their child attends a morning *and* afternoon session, and there is an open door policy for parents to talk to the manager. Each child has a key worker to support the parent as well as the child. Children's names are used a lot both directly to the child and also where appropriate on coat hooks, boxes, and baskets. It is an important part of these children's self-esteem and identity that they are both recognised as valuable individuals and that there are some things (a box or basket) that is exclusively theirs. High levels of praise and encouragement is a feature of this setting. Practitioners in this setting are countering comments made by parents which are not always appropriate. For the example given above the named-practitioner referred to the support group for parents of mixed heritage, whereas a recorded comment from a parent was that this setting has 'a lot of half-caste children'. Another parent told me 'more people knowing about culture will prevent them being outcasts. They should not be treated differently'. Whatever the terminology, in this setting, children are treated as individuals and supported in the development of their personality and identity within their culture or cultures.

de Haan (1999: 21) takes the perspective that learning is culturally located:

Given that learning can be a result of taking part in any cultural activity, and that the form it takes 'depends' on how that activity is carried out (e.g.

the participation structures, rules, norms and tools of the activity), it

follows that learning activities vary as a function of the cultural activity (including the community that undertakes that activity) of which it is part.

This setting demonstrates how that can be carried out, the training and professionalism required, and that it's not just 'looking after children'.

Case study summary

The settings selected for in-depth research were based on two factors, both the location and the responses on the setting-questionnaire indicating a rich cultural environment, with some interesting comments and statements regarding cultural identity. For the purposes of this research the variations between the settings were gratifyingly different, as they give an overall picture of diversity and approaches to my area of research. The results show that location alone is not the determining factor for the development of a positive cultural identity, positive approaches are experienced in county areas, and developmental delay of cultural awareness can occur in inner city situations. As a check-list for settings wanting to move up the cultural ladder I offer the following statements:

- location is not the deciding factor
- settings need to move on from the 'icons'
- preconceptions are not helpful
- enthusiasm goes a long way
- look at provision from a different perspective
- consider the impression given to visitors
- professionalism at its best is the aim

Part 4:

Iconic symbols of multi-culturalism

The four icons of multi-culturalism are festivals (particularly Chinese New Year, Christmas, and Diwali), dolls, books, and imaginative play, particularly dressing up clothes. This was confirmed on the Ofsted report referred to earlier in relation to setting 9 which states:

Children are learning to respect diversity within their immediate and wider community through planned and spontaneous activities, toys and resources such as *dressing up clothes, dolls and books*. They take part in celebrations of different *festivals* from around the world ...

(doc. setting 9: 2008)

Festivals

Festivals are significant factors in most people's lives, as a cultural event if not a religious one. Life without festivals would be dull. Festivals are a feature of all early years' settings, some make it low key, others give much time and energy to certain festivals. Unless the setting is established to support a particular religious group, when naturally they would expect their festivals to be prominent, then the most commonly celebrated ones are Christmas, Diwali, and Chinese New Year. I researched general early years' provision, from a range of types of settings. None of them were supported by a particular ideology or religious group. It is good to celebrate these festivals but not to the exclusion of others. Children need to know something of the diversity of the world, which is brought to them through their home and community life and their setting. A young child's life is restricted and relatively isolated, revolving as it does around the adult who accompanies them. This makes it even more pertinent that settings raise the profile and support cultural diversity, so that it is not strange or unknown to the child that there is a wider world out there with broad and subtle cultural differences. Identity is formed not only from within, but also in the context of what is external i.e. the differences.

Celebrating festivals like Diwali and Chinese New Year are fun and help children learn about a number of cultures. But they are unlikely to have much effect on their attitudes towards adults and children from these cultures especially if this is the only time that the particular culture is focused on.
(Brown 2001: 111)

I was asked by a leading publisher to write two books on festivals for practitioners. They were to be part of a planned series identifying two associated festivals in each book. I was given the titles and format. One was on the Hindu festivals of Diwali and Holi, the other Chinese New Year and Dragon Boat Festival; other books in the series would include Muslim and Christian festivals. While I am happy to pass on information, ideas, and knowledge to enable practitioners to develop their own resource bank of

knowledge, I questioned the publishers on the choice of festivals, particularly Diwali and Chinese New Year. 'We have done our research' they told me 'and we are told this is what practitioners want'. I cannot challenge this response other than to say that it is likely that if asked practitioners will request these festivals, because they are largely unaware of the many other festivals that they could be celebrating. I asked if there would be space in the format to add, at least, a list of additional festivals relating to India and China, to encourage practitioners to look into them further, and was told 'no'. I felt this was an opportunity lost.

The Daycare Trust survey (2008a: 9) questioned practitioners from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds about embracing cultural differences. Part of that response was:

Participants spoke at length about how their settings celebrate different religious festivals and raise awareness of cultures and ways of life among the children and parents

I believe this should not be fixed on those three familiar festivals with its consequent affect on the development of practitioners, setting, and ultimately the children as shown in the case study of setting 4 in Chapter 4.

The word festival implies a celebration of a particular religious or community event which is generally just a fun activity for the children. Some parents are concerned that it is a form of religious indoctrination, yet in the context of the setting this cannot be so. Festivals are often a vehicle for skills development like cutting and gluing Mother's day cards, colouring in stars and moons, or cooking pancakes. They present an opportunity to welcome parents and the extended family into the setting, and perhaps for them to reciprocate by demonstrating a relevant cultural activity to children and practitioners. It is the value given to the festival that may give an unbalanced view to those for whom it has no cultural significance. Celebrating festivals is a valid proposal in the

annual planning for the setting, providing account is taken of the impact on the children and families attending. This needs to be made clear to families using the setting, and their views and concerns should be taken into account. An example from setting 19, in their Equal Opportunity Policy reads:

Without indoctrination in any specific faith, children will be made aware of the festivals which are being celebrated by their own families and others, and will be introduced where appropriate to the stories behind the festivals.

Some white English parents in the research questioned the knowledge of practitioners and claimed that they understood and celebrated 'Asian' or 'other' festivals more than they did traditional English or Christian festivals. I think this was a misunderstanding by parents about the nature of promotion of knowledge and understanding of culture by practitioners. Parents polarised world festivals and ignored those they were familiar with, which made it appear biased towards cultures other than their own and results in a divisive effect. The fact that settings often celebrate Christmas, Easter, Pancake Day, Bonfire Night, Harvest Festival, maybe St George's Day or May Day, cook and eat traditional English food, read English stories in English that are so part of the English culture that they are not recognised for what they are. This is the difficulty in identifying the dominant culture, people do not always recognise it as such because 'it's just what we do'.

Dolls

Ask for a list of multi-cultural resources and dolls will head the list; they have become a cultural myth, a substitute for the real thing – they represent culture. Good representations of ethnically diverse dolls should be in the settings, but not dolls at any price. I wanted to buy a black doll for my granddaughter and spotted one while at a popular supermarket. The price was reasonable, the features reasonably representative, and it was convenient to buy there. I could not get into the box so I took it to customer services and asked them to check the colour of the body. They looked at me in amazement but graciously undid the

box and pulled the clothes up. It was white. I refused to buy as it gave completely the wrong message. At first the customer service staff sniggered until they realised I was serious. I explained that for a small child it may not seem strange to have a black face, head, arms and legs with a white body, but in the absence of a black human body to investigate this child may well believe that all black people were white under their clothes, it would be giving a mixed message - that it was OK to be black on the outside, but white was the colour to be underneath.

Dolls were claimed to be in every setting, and were in the ones I visited. There were generally more white dolls than black, and there was a dearth of Asian, Oriental, or mixed heritage dolls. Not all ethnically diverse dolls are good models as often they have the same features as the white dolls, the same moulds being used with different coloured plastic. They also tend to be more expensive than a white doll which can be bought in the High Street. So while dolls are important 'a doll doth not a multicultural setting make'.

As good quality black dolls are not readily available in supermarkets and high street shops, as described above and in the 'cultural journey' of the practitioner studying an Argos catalogue (case study setting 6), this will exclude BME families from buying appropriate dolls for their children. There is a range available from expensive educational suppliers which are not available to local communities. This is an example of the exclusivity experienced by BME families.

Books

Dual language books give children the impression that stories and information can be expressed in different ways. Having parents tell stories in their own language, with a translation by the practitioner, demonstrates to the child who speaks that language that it, and they, are as important as the English speakers. The local library may have, or been able to supply, dual language books or offer a story telling session using more than one language.

The easiest way is probably the most effective: the resources available at a nearby library. While books on racial and cultural differences have been written for decades, within the last few years publishers have been devoting an increasing amount of attention to these subjects.

(Powell Hopson et al 1993)

Libraries are available to loan books to early years' settings but this resource is not always taken up (see setting 13 Chapter 4), and seems to be a missed opportunity. Parents want children to learn rhymes and songs and this is another outlet for either teaching them in an alternative language or the same song in two languages. Self-identity of the child comes from feeling valued and accepted within their own culture.

Dressing up and imaginative play

At a playgroup or day-care center, and in your own home, make sure dolls, toys, and games reflect racial diversity. From the age of two on children do have symbolic play, they begin to use their imagination and use playthings to act out daily life experiences.

(Powell Hopkins 1993: 121)

Identity has defied firm description even though many have tried to define it. It ends up as a long list of circumstances in which we find ourselves, tied together with tradition and familial bonds.

Children's cultural, linguistic, class and gender backgrounds are not an optional extra for early years practitioners to consider. Rather they are central to an understanding of the child's development and achievement, and to the development of a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum.

(Burgess-Macey and Crichlow 1996: 132)

There are many opportunities for cultural awareness to be developed through imaginative play. Examples seen during the research was the shop in setting 13 with culturally relevant products to sell boxes and packets with alternative scripts describing contents, representational food more familiar to some children than others, labels and signs – open, closed, shop – in alternative scripts, order pads and pens for the children to write 'messages' in their own script. There was also the use of familiar objects like the saris used in setting 19 for making the climbing frame into a house, or a puppet theatre, or lightly forming a semi-

transparent house roof for the youngest children in setting 9, or having a picnic on a sari in setting 18. Having a familiar home corner, as in settings 9 and 19, gives children a sense of security. This can be changed from an English home, to an Asian home, to a Chinese home, to a Polish home, by the change of crockery and eating utensils, wall posters, floor cushions, costumes to dress in, representational food, jewellery, and artefacts.

As in different cultures different ways of acting upon the world are created and stored in artefacts and those artefacts play a central role in the formation of the mind, it follows that learning and development differ from one culture to another. Learning may vary in accordance with the educational efforts or social skills with which individuals are confronted. (de Haan 1999: 7)

The researcher-introduced resources gave an opportunity for imaginative play. Children chose members of a family, theirs or an imaginary one, gave them names and positions, laid them out in a row for a pretend photograph, picked a football team, played with them in the dolls house, and wheeled them around the room in their wheelchair.

Researcher-introduced resources

Children like people! In varying degrees the people resources went down well with all ages, and the results were more productive the more actively involved the named-practitioner was. Selected for their variety, and chosen to suit the younger as well as older children in the settings, of the seven resources all but one proved popular. With the exception of the face lotto, as described in Chapter 3, the six other researcher-introduced resources were all purchased from major early years suppliers. Without seeing the people resources, it may be difficult to visualise. To aid understanding I have included the following table which sets out a brief description of the items, the order of popularity, and my comments on their use.

	Order of popularity highest 1 – lowest 7	Comment
1	Small family cut-out figures Four three-generation families from four ethnic groups	By far the most popular and productive. Used in numerous ways, families, in the dolls house, lined up for a school photograph, and a football team. With the under 4s skin colour was irrelevant, 'family' were chosen by hair and clothes. Max 20cm high
2	Face lotto Made by researcher because no suitable resources available commercially	This resource was offered more frequently than the others, and the one the named-practitioner was asked to use at some point in the observations. Proved popular, but was more of a research instrument than the others as it was the one that could be compared in five settings
3	Inset jigsaw Five multi-cultural painted figures that slot into hole in puzzle base – when removed figures stand up and have a secondary use	Popular with the youngest children. Complete figures could be removed and played with elsewhere. Made from thick wood and would stand up. Figures are painted with a caricaturist look
4	Large cut-outs people Individual characters in a variety of ages, male and female, different ages and sizes. All wearing T-shirts in a small range of colours	31 figures ranging in size from 5cm to 36cm Designed for wall displays. Children imaginative in their use. Stimulates play and questions about the people Children attracted to them because of size, but really too big and floppy to be used in that way
5	Floor puzzles of photographs of children Slightly smaller than life-size, big chunky pieces	Enjoyed by the younger children. Pieces big enough for them to get hold of. Stimulated discussion
6	Family photographs Showing different family groupings, some in traditional costumes	Lovely bright photographs showing a variety of families in naturalistic group poses. Families range from one parent and one child, to a large extended family Seen by some minority ethnic children who were delighted to recognise people who looked like them
7	2-3-4 pieces shaped jigsaws Graded, free shape puzzles, curved edges meet together but did not link. No base	Painted children doing things, each one a complete puzzle. Pieces push together, but easily move apart, which can be frustrating. Designed for the youngest children Not chosen by any named-practitioner for use in their setting

Table 11: Researcher-introduced resources

Researcher-introduced resources in practice

'Granddad' shouted the newly settled white boy excitedly picking up a small cut-out figure and searching for a partner. Picking up an Asian woman wearing shalwar kameez and scarf he identified her as 'nana'. Having selected more he made sounds as if to identify them, but as his language had not developed sufficiently for us to understand him we could not confirm this. A white girl joined him, picked an Asian woman in shalwar kameez and identified her as 'mama'. These two two-year-olds are from all white families (as identified by the practitioner), so their attachment to the figures was by selection other than skin colour or clothes. They had correctly identified the gender of the figures. Derman Sparks (1989: 2) suggests that by the 'age of two children are learning the appropriate use of gender labels (boy, girl) and learning names of colours, which they then begin to apply to skin colour'.

Where the adult is actively involved in the play, and where children are positively encouraged to behave in this manner on a regular basis, they are much more responsive. This was the case in setting 19. Children gathered around making up stories, figures all in a row 'they're having their photos taken', 'I'm having this one to play football with', 'shh mum and dad are asleep in bed'. A story about playing football ensued with children taking turns to add the next bit of the tale. As the story waxed and waned other children came along and added their contribution as the story moved from football to hockey and now consisted of two teams. These three and four-year-olds had no more interest or accuracy in matching skin tones to themselves or their family members than the two-year-olds at the previous setting; a white boy chose a Chinese mother and father, a black brother and a white brother to represent his family. These children are on the cusp of awareness of differences as between the ages of three and five children try to figure out what are the essential attributes of themselves, and which aspects of their identity remain constant (Derman-Sparks 1989: 2) As their self-awareness develops children need a good deal of help to sort through the many experiences and variables of identity. Having resources which can

initiate these discussions, and confident practitioners to steer them through the maze of enlightenment, they will grow to the next stage of development knowing who they are.

The named-practitioners had not been given any direction in the use of any of the resources; I, as the researcher was interested to see how they would respond. Predictably the two-year-olds had only a passing interest and the named-practitioners role was to put the figures out, encourage the children to look, and to interpret their responses in the light of the knowledge of the children and their family (setting 9). The two most able named-practitioners (settings 19 and 22) initiated much more imaginative play for longer periods. The three other settings (6,13,18) followed much the same pattern of sitting at the table with a group of children, spreading the figures out and asking children to identify people they know. With the right experience and confidence practitioners can inject an enthusiasm into the activity, which becomes self-perpetuating as the stimulation passes on from one child to the next. The small family cut-out figures occupied the children longer in all the settings (6,9,13,18,19,22) they were used in, than any of the other researcher-introduced resources.

As described in Chapter 3, I made my own resources to construct a face lotto game. The named-practitioners invented ways of presenting the face lotto game. 'This is how we can play this game' the named-practitioner told the children as she carefully explained what was expected of them. It was played the traditional way, with the children turn-taking and turning one card over at a time, adding it to their baseboard if it matched a face there. With each picture the named-practitioner (setting 6) explored features with the children, eye and hair colour, teeth showing, boy or girl, Asking questions of the children and involving them all. Other named-practitioners played the game straight or, in one instance, the named-practitioner (setting 19) encouraged the children by drawing them in. Sitting alone at the table with the faces spread before her a child wandered over with a curious look. She was holding a toy monkey and polar bear. Imaginatively the named-practitioner led the conversation to link the

monkey into a story about it seeing the children in front of her and the child stopped for a few minutes examining the faces and placing on the base-board.

Although the in-set people puzzle is just that, it can serve a dual purpose in that the five puzzles pieces can stand up on their own and be used elsewhere. This proved to be the case. They disappeared into the doll's house, were kept close to the body, were arranged, standing up, around the base-board. The painted figures represent people in costume from around the world, like an Indian woman in a sari, and an African woman in a long flowing dress and turban. Children had a go and went away, coming back a few minutes later. On one occasion several children were attracted to the jigsaw; taking all the pieces out, looking carefully at the board and, often by trial and error, putting them all back in again. Practitioners encouraged and praised the children with every little achievement. In-set jigsaws are designed for the novice, the youngest children, who get a sense of achievement as that little wooden person eventually slides into the slot and stays there.

Swooping on the large cut-out people the figures seem to energise the children. They are larger than most characters the children have to play with, so there is a novelty value to them, and there are plenty of them so that the action can be performed in several corners of the room. Several children were seen 'walking' their figure around the room, and introducing them as real people. The imagination is coming into play with a little less conventional resource. Concern was expressed for the woman in the wheelchair, in one setting she was wheeled upright around the room, and also chosen as the mummy figure by another child, in another, a discussion was held as to why she was in a wheelchair. 'Perhaps she has broken her legs' suggested one girl. The adult joined in explaining some of the reasons for wheelchair use, 'Maybe they are just lazy' suggested another. By three, children are displaying signs of being influenced by societal norms and biases of gender or race or having different abilities (Derman-Sparks 1989: 2 see Chapter 2). The named-practitioner and children discussed families and the

reasons given by the children for matching up groups of people ‘they are all wearing yellow T-shirts’ said one, and several children matching up in twos explained their reasoning – colour of T-shirt, hair colour, size. ‘This man is fat. He’s massive.’ Carpet-time was an opportunity to discuss social issues, with the named-practitioner (setting 18) taking the lead. ‘What is a family?’, ‘People’ and ‘Who is in a family?’ and then a lively interaction as other practitioners held the figures up and children selected ‘their’ family. Younger children picked multi-racial families; an older Asian girl was delighted with her wholly Asian family. There was very positive interaction with the figures.

For two and three-year-olds individual floor puzzles of four children almost as big as themselves is a challenge. This resource was used at two settings (4,9), where one named-practitioner put the puzzles on the floor and the other placed two puzzles awkwardly on a table. The older children showed their competency, with a little help, while the younger children needed more support from the named-practitioner. The puzzles have large pieces like a whole arm, or half a leg and some of the children had difficulty deciding which was the left or right of the body. One child turned the arm over from the photographic side to the plain blue backside to try to fix it on the wrong side.

When a child goes to a setting it is comforting to see something familiar. The family photographs do just that. Taken in naturalistic settings, in clothes they are likely to wear in this country, every combination of family grouping has been catered for. This causes excitement in the children as they identify familiar figures, and groupings they recognise. An Asian girl could not stop beaming as she came across a photograph of an extended Asian family and identified granddad and papa. She clung to the photograph, studying it carefully to check it had not gone away, and it really was a family like hers. The children did not react to families dissimilar to theirs, not taking a lot of interest in them, and searching for someone they can relate to. This action is not dissimilar to the discussion earlier about skin tone paper; the child has a need to belong, which

takes us back full circle to then end of Chapter 1 where I define cultural identity, the last line of which is 'cultural identity is about belonging'

The two-three-four piece people puzzles were not selected by any of the named-practitioners for use. They are not as helpful as the in-set puzzles, as there is nothing to stop them being pushed apart, or as attractive to the children as the people cut-outs. It is interesting that out of seven independent named-practitioners not one chose this resource.

Summary of this chapter and into the next

By viewing through an interpretive lens in this chapter positive practice in the settings, in relation to cultural identity, has been identified and teased out. The effect of having a researcher present has been considered and judgements made on how naturalistic observations can really be, without a degree of distortion. Parents and practitioners expressed their views on ethnic monitoring and views on white culture were explored. The case studies in Chapter 4 were reviewed and proved to give an excellent insight into the practice of a range of different settings. The data collected and reported will add to knowledge required to improve training programmes for childcare and education practitioners. Four icons of multi-culturalism, found in the majority of settings, have been identified and discussed. Researcher-introduced resources brought a new dimension into the research, as neither practitioners nor children had experience of these particular resources until this research was conducted.

The next chapter sums up the process, recalling incidences and examples drawn from the thesis and personal experience, and takes the reader into the way forward with suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 7 - SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The more I know, the less I know, the more I need to know.

Meg Jones (2008)

Introduction

This has been a long journey, a journey of discovery and fulfilment. I have traversed the storms from 'where do I start' to 'help it's time to finish', met many interesting people along the way, and had opportunities to share good practice with practitioners that I would not otherwise had the chance to meet. In this summing up I refer to:

- key conclusions from my examination of the development of cultural identity in early childhood settings
- the position I was in when I started the research programme
- the extensive reading of material from many sources and countries, only to find there was so much more
- the research process and what I found
- what I learned and the changes along the way
- my final thoughts on the way forward

Key conclusions

Cultural identity is hidden under layers of tradition and custom. This research has exposed it to the light where it flutters around, tenuous and elusive, looking for a definition, looking for a home. There were times when I thought I had found it, in the culture, in the setting, in society, only to find it hiding deep inside the individual. There are those who say we have no cultural identity until we are older, and those who say it begins at birth. Even birth is culturally contrived, so from day one you are living the subject and absorbing a cultural identity. There is no escape, and for that I am thankful. Questions have been asked and some answers given, but there is still much to be gained from the data collected.

Where did I come from?

My 'cultural journey' has been long and fascinating, challenging and satisfying, arduous and enjoyable, and still goes on. When I started the MPhil I had little idea of the trials and triumphs I would go through, not on my own but with

supportive academics, fellow research students, and most significantly practitioners, children and their parents to whom I am ever grateful. The practitioners particularly travelled with me on that journey, showing me the way, pointing out the highlights, demonstrating the pitfalls, feeding me the information, and waving me on my way. The children played in the sand while the parents watched. This thesis is a record of that journey, the route map to the way forward.

We're all here, and we have to learn to live together or our children will be bequeathed a future of prejudice, conflict, and lost opportunities. By not taking this road, we risk a dysfunctional society that is too concerned with tensions to evolve into a more enlightened civilization.

(Powell Hopson et al 1993: 139)

What does the literature say?

From the literature review came the research questions relating to three areas 1) the cultural environment of the settings, 2) through what means practitioners understand cultural identity is acquired, and 3) how this is played out in practice. These questions have been addressed, and specifically referenced at points throughout the thesis.

Culture is an all encompassing concept which envelops us in a sense of security which becomes familiar and comforting. It is what we do and the way that we do it, not in isolation but within a context. Siraj-Blatchford (1994: 28) writes 'culture in any society is learned'. It constantly evolves as we take in new experiences and new roles, yet that is not how we perceive it; we see it as unchanging, the cuddle blanket we snuggle into at times of crisis and happiness. Identity is, as the literature tells us over again by many different authors, not fixed, ever changing, responding and moving on, another facet added to the diamond. Different views are expressed, touching, overlapping, overlaying, extending, and promoting our knowledge of culture and cultural identity. It is a complex, nebulous subject area to grasp, and just when you think you understand another theory comes along.

Children are aware of difference at a very young age; the significance of that difference is internalised by the child by assimilating the actions and reactions of those around them. Parents and early years' settings play a major influence in that process. If what they see and experience is the superiority of one action or feature over another it is absorbed into normality by the child. This applies to the more overt differences like skin colour, languages, and disability, but also the covert values placed on gender, religion, or social standing. Children are not born prejudiced, they learn how to make these judgements and set up a personal hierarchy.

Where good practice is demonstrated, an anti-discrimination approach adopted, children will acknowledge and respect difference. In the examples demonstrated in this research, where children have chosen multi-racial parents, or families, from a choice of researcher-introduced cut-out figures no prejudice was directed towards the people represented by the resources. An example of prejudice is given by Brown (1998: 53) in reference to a 4-year-old Pakistani boy, unfamiliar with eating with a knife and fork and struggling to use them at school, who is admonished for eating with his fingers. This shows a lack of understanding where a cultural practice commonplace in his home has an hierarchical position placed on it making it unacceptable in different settings. Children need time and support to adjust to cultural differences, which could in some instances be described as 'culture shock'.

Practitioners do not always feel well equipped to deal with issues around cultural identity; this is shown in the literature and in the course of progress in the research. To keep within their 'comfort zone' practitioners start, and sometimes their practice is arrested at this point, with the icons of multi-culturalism – festivals, dolls, books, dressing up and imaginative play, and they think that is all they have to do. It is not. Children also need to be in a learning environment which teaches attitudes and values that do not discriminate against certain sections of the community, that are open and welcoming whatever the difference. A cultural identity needs nurturing, needs establishing and building up, sometimes needs comforting and support, and needs to be recognised in the self-esteem of the child.

The boost to acknowledge the valuing of diversity came for child care and education practitioners with the Children Act 1989 (HMSO 1991:32). For the first time a major piece of legislation recognised that ‘values deriving from different backgrounds – racial, cultural, religious and linguistic – should be recognised and respected’. Since then practice has moved a long way, but not in all instances far enough. There is consensus in the literature of the importance of culture, and cultural identity, how succeeding reports, legislation, contemporary research, and European Union directives are pushing forward thought. Article 1 in the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) states:

Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations.

The momentum must not be broken.

The political aspects of multi-culturalism concern practitioners because their experience in the setting is not represented by the conflicts described by the media. The practitioners’ aim is to encourage all children to live and play together, to respect and understand difference. Children learn tolerance and acceptance through example and experience, within a supportive environment, and discover and identify with the similarities between each other.

What I did and what I found

This research involved gaining consent from the parents and children, observing them in their everyday play in the setting, and recording and interpreting the interaction between practitioners and children when presented with researcher-introduced resources. Prior to that, settings and parents in Leicester and Leicestershire had completed questionnaires to enable me to select appropriate settings for in-depth research.

There were settings offering high levels of cultural resources and the attitudes and understanding to get the best out of them to support the development of cultural identity. Willing practitioners following the path of discernment were perceptive, and had appropriate knowledge and understanding. Others lagged behind a little; there was cultural developmental delay which, with appropriate training and support, could be addressed. One end of the continuum of good practice is excellence; well trained and informed practitioners, the ability to put that knowledge into practice, supportive attitudes, and well resourced settings. Moving along the good practice spectrum it continued despite having to share facilities; demonstrating how enthusiasm and commitment can overcome what, to some, would be insurmountable obstacles in their way. The setting at the further along the continuum was by no means demonstrating bad practice generally; it was just fixed in a time-frame that was not progressing along cultural awareness lines. Parents expressed their satisfaction, without being conscious of what really happens in their child's setting, a screen of facadism pervades in that the setting looks good – and in many ways is – but the gaps behind are unreported, unobserved, and unrecognised. Care is not in question in any of the settings. All of the settings selected for in-depth research were chosen because of their awareness, and reporting of their resources on the setting-questionnaire. This thesis is primarily focussed on cultural identity, and that is where some holes have been found, as identified at the end of this chapter. Without research, which legitimises practice, progress in early years will become static and unrecognised. Cultural identity is but one aspect of development, but an important and integral part of emotional health and development.

At a time when childcare and early years' provision is expanding through government support and initiatives, such as SureStart, Children's Centres, Every Child Matters, free part-time education for three and four-year-olds, and with the Early Years Foundation Stage recently introduced, research into the development of cultural identity in the young children is apt. Practitioners are much more aware of the need for progression and development of their practice. This research demonstrates that, but does not stop there; it identifies good

practice presented in different ways, to support different communities, from which examples can be taken to other types of settings.

What have I learned and how things change

I have learned how to devise a research programme, the practicalities and the pitfalls; that ambitious projects require immense energy and resources, including human resources, and to trust my abilities. When I started the MPhil I knew I wanted to research cultural identity but had little concept as to how to begin that process. Initially I wanted to 'take on the world'. Dampened by my supervisor's shaking head, I tentatively suggested the country, more head shakes, the Midlands? 'Too ambitious'. Having worked in Leicester and Leicestershire I came nearer home recognising what a good choice that would make with its cultural mix. I still wanted to take on more than was humanly possible for one person to conduct and, reluctantly, settled for the number that I did. I now feel this was on the outside edge of what was possible for me with other constraints I was experiencing. I did after all have other commitments. It also took over my life for 1,000+ days over several years.

The period of this research has been extended longer than is desirable, and during that period views on researching with children has moved on. Researchers are encouraged to be more inclusive of children in their work – children should be participants rather than subjects (Greene and Hogan 2005: 12). Researchers should devise innovatory methods of data collection, the value of which has been demonstrated in this research (Lewis et al 2004: 1-4), and should make the children's views heard. This could be metaphorical, as the 'voice' of the child may be an emotional response, a visual application, written or spoken (Clark and Moss 2001:1). Ethical research with children is now high on the agenda (Farrell 2005: 4-5). All these aspects need to be carried forward into any future research initiated by this thesis.

In 2007 I was asked by the editor of a national practitioner magazine to write one article on cultural diversity. She gave no indication as to what the focus should be, asking me for ideas; she just knew it was something she should be offering. I put together a brief, which she accepted totally, only asking me to extend these

ideas into seven articles. The willingness is there, the recognition that it is important, but not necessarily the understanding of what and why. Conversely, as referred to in Chapter 6, I wrote two books in a festival series published by a major educational publisher. Another book in the series was titled Harvest and I was pleased to see it, thinking it had been the opportunity to raise children's awareness of harvest, and harvest festivals around the world. There would be sufficient material to occupy them for a whole year. However I was greatly disappointed to see it only covered Christian Harvest Festival.

Final thoughts on the way forward

We see, without seeing, we experience, without using that experience. This research has given me the opportunity to study in-depth a long-held area of interest into cultural identity in early childhood. The outcomes in this thesis are not just my views, they are also the views of the practitioners, parents, and the 'voice' of the children, to express what is happening in these selected settings, what they would like to happen, what it is like to experience it, and how it might be improved. There are no easy answers and no universal truths, we can only chip away at what we have to move practice ever onwards. When I set out on my career with young children over forty years ago, ethnicity and culture was not even on the agenda; it has moved a long way since then. It became an issue in the UK in the 1960s with the increase in immigration of black workers from the West Indies, and then Asians expelled from Uganda in the 1970s, and subsequent immigration leading to the global world movement we have today. Cultural differences were only then recognised because they were more visible, although there had always been many cultural differences in the white community; but because they were white it was not widely recognised or acknowledged. Ethnicity in the white community is largely ignored, if not actively denied, 'we all have an ethnicity and it is formed by our multiple identities' (Siraj-Blatchford 1994: 154). Ethnicity is cited in many references, often in relation to minority cultures, ignoring white ethnicity. Culture has gradually moved to mainstream thinking, but cultural identity per se is not even a consideration for some practitioners (see setting 4 Chapters 4 and 5); this research demonstrates it still has some way to go.

Culture can no longer be ignored. Practitioners recognise the need to provide resources to raise awareness of cultural differences, with varying degrees of success as demonstrated. This does not stop at the setting's door, Ofsted inspectors too need to raise their awareness levels to appreciate that cultural awareness is more than 'doing Diwali' and having a 'good range of positive resources provided to reflect diversity'. Culture is not static; our level of response must not be static.

It is not possible to finish without a wish list of potential further research which will add to the original contribution to knowledge described in this thesis.

Further investigation, suggested by but outside the remit of this research:

- To research recruitment policies to establish reasons for all white recruitment in inner city settings. How many settings does this apply to? Is this something the Local Authority Early Years and Childcare Teams should be looking at offering training and support for? Does the culture of a particular setting militate against ethnically diverse practitioners?
- Culture sensitivity training for practitioners. Greater emphasis in initial training and continuing professional development. Development of a cultural awareness training pack for practitioners unable to access face-to-face training, or as additional support, advice and information.
- Develop methods of supporting parents' involvement in settings to the level they are able to participate. Involving them in producing guidelines about specific cultural norms, including white parents, for practitioners.
- Increased sharing of cultural knowledge between parents and practitioners. Training for parents in cultural awareness, including minority ethnic groups, as they too have limited knowledge about cultures outside their experience.

- Instruction on basic words from different languages, in order to support bi-lingual and multi-lingual children, and to introduce mono-lingual children towards the acceptance and benefits of additional languages.
- Several African/ Caribbean parents made reference to practitioners needing to learn more about their culture, not a comment made by any of the Asian parents. A black practitioner perceived gaps in resources in her setting. Is black culture a neglected area in our settings? Is there an issue to raise in 'mixedness' and opportunities for supporting parents of mixed-heritage children?
- The development of resources for supporting the development of cultural identity.

Children are our future; it is our responsibility to care for and nurture the young so that they grow up confident and purposeful, secure in the knowledge of themselves within their culture. Cultural identity is not an add-on, not something to be addressed or ignored at will, not a fashion that will change, but an essential element of every growing child whatever their ethnic background and origin. We all live within our culture, and our cultural identity is an integral part of that.

Trevarthen (1998: 87) refers to 'the innate need that children have to live and learn

in culture, as fish swim in the sea and the birds fly in the air, not to the acquired or cultivated need of the scholar to describe and explain *about* culture'

A lot done, a lot to do

(Report title: Commission for Racial Equality)

Appendices

Appendix 1
Setting Questionnaire

EARLY YEARS STAFF QUESTIONNAIRE – information

‘How society rids itself of such attitudes is not something which we can prescribe, except to stress the need for education and example at the youngest age, and an overall attitude of ‘zero tolerance’ of racism within our society’

Report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry’
(1999) para. 7.42

As an early years practitioner and manager, with forty years experience, I am currently researching cultural identity of young children in group settings. This research will be undertaken in Leicester and Leicestershire and I am registered as an MPhil/ PhD student at De Montfort University. I have a long-term commitment to equal opportunities and the results of this research will be published nationally for the benefit of all practitioners and, of course, ultimately the children.

The focus of the research is the development of cultural identity in young children. I am exploring this by working with staff, parents, and children and am looking for examples of good practice which can be shared for the benefit of all. By cultural identity I mean children knowing who they are within the context of their culture. This includes their ethnicity, whether that be white, black, specific as in Indian or Jewish, and will reflect religious perspective as appropriate. Culture encompasses lifestyle, belief, childrearing practices, family roles, customs, language, and historical context.

This questionnaire is being sent to a range of group settings in Leicestershire and I would appreciate your co-operation in completing it. I would be even more delighted if you agreed to work with me on developing the project at a future date.

The results of the research will be shared with participants.

Meg Jones

Contact person:

Job title

Telephone number

Contact address

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PLEASE RETURN ALL QUESTIONNAIRES IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED

by or contact Meg Jones (Tel:01283 711051)

Address for correspondence:

Meg Jones

De Montfort University

Department of Social and Community Studies

Scraptoft Campus

Leicester

Please give me some insight into the profile of your setting.

Type of setting: **Please as appropriate**
 Private Nursery (full-day)
 Education Nursery (sessional)
 Playgroup (sessional)
 Playgroup (full-day)
 Community Group (Parent/Carer & Toddler, Creche)(sessional)
 Other (Please state full-day or sessional)

Children in your setting (ethnicity and religion as defined by the parents where known). Please indicate children who have attended over the past two years.

Black []	African Caribbean []	African []
White []	Irish [] Welsh []	English [] Scottish []
Asian []	Pakistani []	Indian [] Bangladeshi []
Chinese []		
Dual heritage /Mixed heritage []		
Other (please identify)_____		

Hindu []	Christian	Muslim []
Pagan []	Jewish []	No religion []
Other (please identify)_____		Not identified []

Please identify staff (paid or unpaid) by above categories.

Indicate current balance of children in your group	% white	% minority ethnic
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Enclosed are questionnaires for parents. If you wish to photocopy extra parental questionnaires to give to all the parents this will be appreciated. If you only give out the ten provided please will you distribute amongst those parents with children around three years old if possible.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Meg Jones

EARLY YEARS STAFF QUESTIONNAIRE

It is anticipated this will be a team response.

- 1) Do you have any policies or guidelines relating to the development of cultural identity? It possibly will be in your equal opportunities policy. (If so can I have a copy please?)

- 2) Indicate how your group reflects a multicultural environment (tick as many items as appropriate and add others in blank squares if it has not been represented)

Children	Staff	Computer programmes	Borrows multi-cultural resources	Calendars	Maps
Books	Real food for activities		Images (posters, pictures)	Staff attitudes	Dressing up clothes
	Plastic and representational food	Toys	Games	Circle time	
Puppets	Threading faces/ hair plaiting heads	Playground / garden design		Sharing experiences	Masks
Skin tone paint and crayons	Skin tone papers		Music and language tapes	Ethnic dolls	
Print and pattern making	Themes (ie families, myself, journeys, etc)	Welcome posters in many languages		Resources for staff (books, packs, etc)	Cultural face and hand painting
Mirrors	Display tables		Discussions with children		People puzzles
Small world play		Celebrating festivals	Imaginative play	Home corner	Wall displays
	Dual language	Meals and snacks	Cooking		Jigsaws

Craft work	Parental involvement	Stories	Rhymes and songs	Musical instruments	
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Can you give examples of your practice related to developing cultural identity?

- 4) **a)** Have staff received any training in cultural identity in the early years? YES / NO
b) If YES please indicate form of training (course title, conference, workshop, content, etc.)

- c)** If NO would you like to receive such training? YES / NO
What would you like such training to involve.

- d)** If the answer to question 4 **c)** is NO state why you feel it is not required.

- 5) If there is a predominance of one culture in your setting what are your views on promoting knowledge of a wide range of cultures?

- 6) How are parents involved in promoting cultural identity?
Can you give examples?

If you would like to comment further on cultural identity and young children please feel free to write on the back, or on additional sheets.

Meg Jones 2000

Appendix 2

Parental Questionnaire

PARENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE - information

As an early years practitioner and manager, with forty years experience, I am currently researching cultural identity of young children in group settings – nurseries, crèches, playgroups etc. This research will be undertaken in Leicester and Leicestershire and I am registered as an MPhil/ PhD student at De Montfort University. I have a long-term commitment to equal opportunities and the results of this research will be published nationally for the benefit of those working with young children and, of course, ultimately the children themselves. No names will be used without permission.

The focus of the research is the development of cultural identity in young children. I am exploring this by working with staff, parents, and children and am looking for examples of good practice which can be shared for the benefit of all. By cultural identity I mean children knowing who they are within the context of their culture. This includes their ethnicity, whether that be white, black, specific as in Indian or Jewish, and will reflect religious perspective as appropriate. Culture encompasses lifestyle, belief, childrearing practices, family roles, customs, language, and historical context.

This questionnaire is being sent to a range of group settings in Leicestershire and I would appreciate your co-operation in completing it. (Please feel free to ask someone to help you fill it in if you are not sure what to put.) Staff are also filling in a questionnaire. I would be delighted if you and staff at your setting agreed to work with me on developing the project at a future date. The results of the research will be available to you from staff in your group setting.

Meg Jones – Research
Student

Age of your child/ren in this setting. [] [] []

Which of the following best describes your child? Tick in [] box as appropriate

(For more than one child perhaps you could tick in different colours.)

Which of the following best describes yourself? Tick in { } box as appropriate

Black [] { } African Caribbean [] { }

African [] { }

White [] { } Irish [] { }

English [] { }

Welsh [] { }

Scottish [] { }

Asian [] { } Pakistani [] { } Indian [] { } Bangladeshi [] { }

Chinese [] { }

Dual heritage/ Mixed heritage (please identify) [] { } _____

Other (please identify) [] { } _____

Hindu [] { } Christian (please specify) [] { } _____

Pagan [] { } Jewish [] { } Muslim [] { } No religion [] { }

Other (please identify) [] { } _____

PARENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1) a) Are you involved in your child's setting? YES /
NO
- (Involvement could include being a parent helper, a committee member, spending time in the group for celebrations or particular activities, cooking, crafts etc., any other areas.
 - Setting refers to the type of group your child attends (nursery, creche, playgroup etc.), and where you were given this questionnaire.
- b) If YES can you say in what ways?
- c) If NO would you like to be involved? YES/ NO
- 2) a) Do you think the things **you** do in the setting influences the development of cultural identity of the children? YES/
NO
- b) Please tell me in what ways?
- 3) Do you think staff help the development of **YOUR OWN** child/ren's cultural identity? YES/ NO
- If YES can you please give some examples?
- 4) What are your views on promoting knowledge and understanding from a range of cultures?

5) Can you suggest any ways you feel that staff would benefit from further training/ information on cultural identity?

If there is anything else you would like to say about cultural identity please write here, or on the back of the questionnaire.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Meg Jones 2000

**PLEASE RETURN YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE
to your child's teacher/ leader/ manager by**

.....

(You may wish to hand it back to staff in a sealed envelope which will be returned unopened to me)

De Montfort University

Department of Social and Community Studies, Scraptoft Campus
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Appendix 3

Training Plan for Named-Practitioner

Cultural Identity in Early Childhood: Valuing Diversity. Researcher Meg Jones

Programme of involvement Officer in Charge (OiC) Setting Tel: email:									
Order	Researcher	Time	Inc	OiC	Inc	Named/ Staff members	Inc	Parents	Date of visits
1	Introduction To research	4 hour	±	*					
2	Tour of setting	1 hour	+	*	+				
3	inform Consent			*		All staff	+	*	
4	Participant observation	4 hours or 2x 2							
5	Document story	1 hour			+	Cultural awareness story			
6	Resources	½ hour			±	Introduce resources			
7	Observation event sampling	1 hour			+	Participation with children			
8						Check-list diary records			
9	Discussion	1 hour		.			+	*	
10	Discussion	1 hour			+	All staff			
11	Roundup of training experiences	2 hours			+	Named staff from all 6 settings together			
12	Executive summary			*					
13	Thank you			*		*		*	
1.2.5.6.7.8.9 Achieved at one session Training package Researcher/ staff member work together									

Appendix 4
Participant Observation Sheet

**Slightly amended for child/ practitioner/
observation sampling/ event sampling**

Setting 4

(14)

Cultural Identity in Early Childhood: Valuing Diversity - Researcher Meg Jones

Observation sampling

Observation sampling

Date 16.9.2002

Options	Time.	Time..	Options	Comments
	10.25	10.56		
Adult activities	✓ 10.50	✓ 11.01	Additional activities (identify)	
Books, stories language				
Communication child to adult - adult to child	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	Hand washing	✓ ✓ ✓
Communication child to child		✓ ✓	Non verbal	
Communication adult to adult	✓	✓		
Dressing up clothes				
Ethnically diverse dolls				
Food related activities				
Imaginative play	✓	✓		
Opportunities for language in play				
Looking at pictures				
Music, songs, instruments	✓ ✓	✓		Song in Gujarati
Observing children	✓ ✓	✓	watching	✓
Puzzles and games				
Skin tone paint, paper, crayons				
Sharing experiences	✓	✓	Sharing self in mirror	✓
Solitary play		✓		
Small world play - mc element				
Themes			Preparing for break time - drink & biscuits	

Researcher signature

Meg Jones

Appendix 5

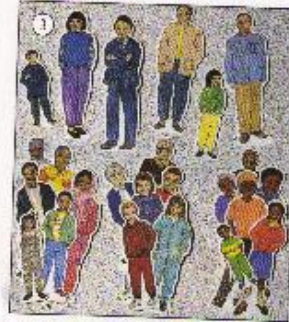
**Example of researcher-introduced
Resources**

NES Arnold Family Figures

You will find many uses for this set of laminated card figures - communicating, language development, imaginative play and so on. Produced after extensive research, particular attention has been paid to producing non-stereotyped figures and a range of cultural backgrounds. The aim of the material is to encourage positive talk and play which reflects our diverse society. Each family group shows three generations, 24 figures in all. Adult figures 20cm (8in) high.

SNB35142

Price £12.50



Faces Borders

A delightful set of 14 borders which when displayed in a line stretch over 10m (30ft). Printed on card from photographs of smiling children from different ethnic backgrounds. A colourful and uplifting addition to any nursery or group room. Length of one border 70cm (28in).

SNB52837

Set £2.85

People Cut Outs

A jumbo pack of 31 large People Cut Outs which will have a wide range of uses for group work or for display. A selection of adults and children are depicted representing many cultures and body shapes - both able bodied and people with disabilities. Ideal for children to gain a stronger understanding of the differences and similarities among all people, as well as an appreciation of groupings such as families and so on. Printed from original photographs on to card sheets, ready cut, just press out. Complete with suggestions for use. Height of adult figures 35cm (14in) approximately.

SNB33817

Set £10.50

Appendix 6

Researcher-introduced resource Observation sheet

Setting 2 (20)

Resource Cultural Identity in Early Childhood: Valuing Diversity - Meg Jones

Presentation

Resource Presentation

Date 20.1.2003

Large people cut-outs.
All figures spread face up on the table
Children sorting out into families.
Picking individual figures up & walking them
around.
2 girls actively engaged in family 'story'
2 boys with small number of figures, looking
but not doing.
Looking at relative size.
Figure in the wheelchair being wheeled around
upright by boy. Another figure standing
upright & talking to her.
Children sitting on carpet facing adult with figures.
'What is a family?' 'People'
'Who is in a family?' 'Mummy', 'Daddy', 'Grandma'
'sister', 'little person', 'baby', 'girl baby'
3 adults now holding a group of figures
One woman, one man, one children.
Individual children asked to select from each
group to make a family.
Younger children picked multi-racial families.
One boy selected wheelchair user as mummy.
Older girl, Asian, picked complete Asian family.
Children happily interacting with their
individual families on the carpet.
Very positive interaction with figures.

Researcher

Meg Jones

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